



GREG CURNOE

Life & Work

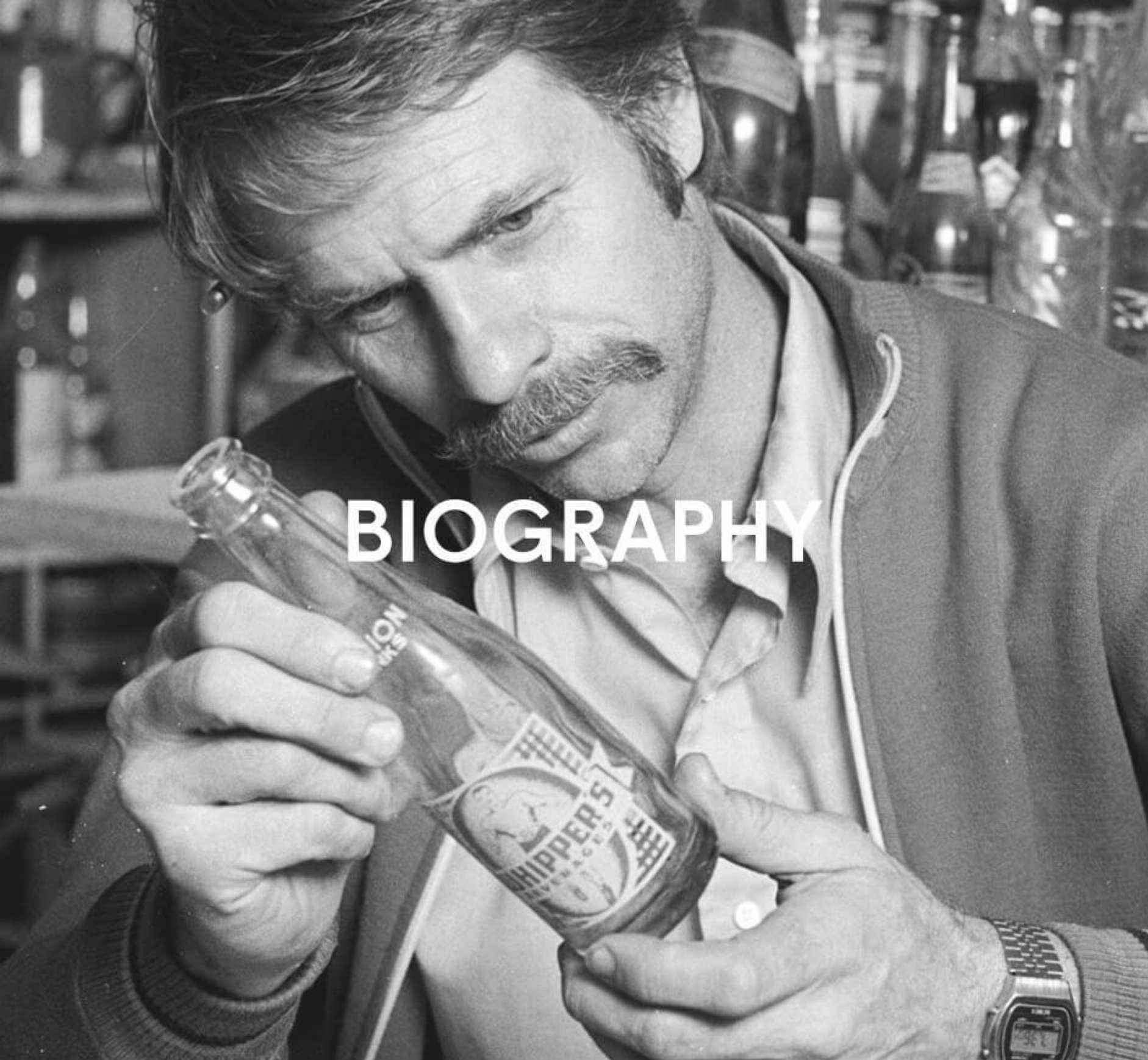
By Judith Rodger

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Greg Curnoe (1936–1992) was the driving force behind a regionalist sensibility that, beginning in the 1960s, made London, Ontario, an important centre for artistic production in Canada. While his oeuvre chronicled his own daily experience in a variety of media, it was grounded in twentieth-century art movements, especially Dada, with its emphasis on nihilism and anarchism, Canadian politics, and popular culture. He is remembered for brightly coloured works that often incorporate text to support his strong Canadian patriotism, sometimes expressed as anti-Americanism, as well as his activism in support of Canadian artists.

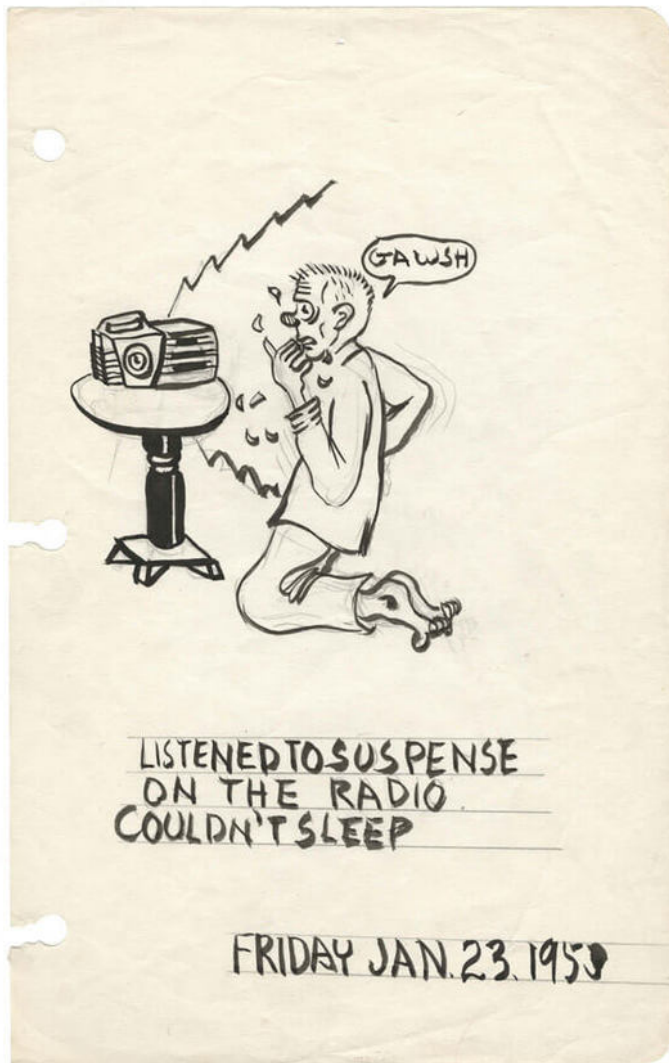
EARLY YEARS

Gregory Richard Curnoe was born on November 19, 1936, at Victoria Hospital in London, Ontario. He grew up with his parents, Nellie Olive (née Porter) and Gordon Charles Curnoe; his brother, Glen (born 1939); and his sister, Lynda (born 1943), in a house built for the family by his grandfather. For most of his life, Curnoe lived within five kilometres of this home in Southwestern Ontario, a peninsula surrounded by water and the United States. American culture was accessible and pervasive, but the city itself was very British in its geographic names, its architectural style, and its conservatism.



LEFT: Greg Curnoe, c. 1938. RIGHT: The Curnoe family at Dingman Creek, c. 1946. *From left, top row: Nellie and Gordon Curnoe; bottom row: Lynda, Glen, and Greg Curnoe, both photographs courtesy of Glen Curnoe.*

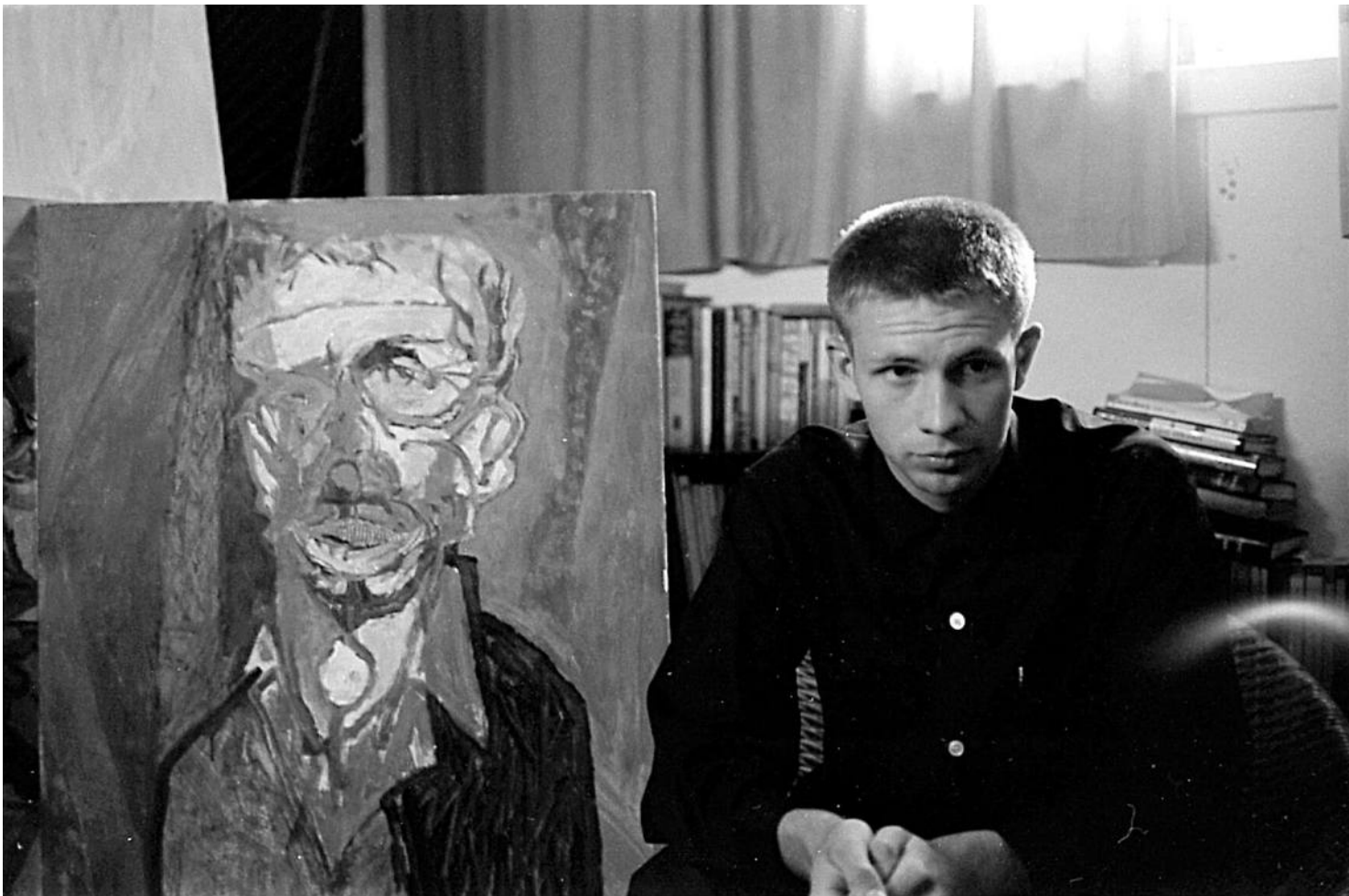
Curnoe's interests and talents revealed themselves early in life. Just after his tenth birthday, a Christmas gift from his parents of a rubber stamp set fostered a lifelong fascination with printed letters and stamps. With his cousin Gary Bryant, Curnoe created dozens of comic books as well as maps and structures made of found objects. His growing facility in drawing and modelling was recognized by prizes at the London Hobby Fair. A childhood interest in collecting—postage stamps, toy soldiers, comic books—presaged the adult collector of pop bottles, slogan buttons, books, records, and friends. An interest in maps began in geography class, where he learned about disputes over national boundaries between Canada and the United States. A habit of writing daily journals began in his teenage years, with a cartoon sketched for each day. Curnoe drew on all these influences throughout his art-making career, inextricably linking his art with his life.



LEFT: A page from Curnoe's 1953 diary showing an early interest in radio. Beginning in his teenage years, Greg Curnoe wrote daily journals. He sketched a cartoon for each of his daily entries. RIGHT: Greg Curnoe, *TransCanada Pop Bottle Collection*, c. 1968-89; ready-made pop bottles, cases, and stand; E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. A selection from Greg Curnoe's collection of pop bottles, which he collected throughout Canada between 1968 and 1989.

Curnoe's interest in a career as a cartoonist probably led him to enroll in the Special Art Program at H.B. Beal Technical and Commercial High School in London, Ontario, in 1954. There, his teachers introduced him to avant-garde art and literature, from Dada, Cubism, and Surrealism to authors such as James Joyce, Franz Kafka, and T.S. Eliot and to composers Igor Stravinsky and Béla Bartók. During this time, Curnoe and his father built his first studio in their basement. The sign on the door read "Curnoe's Inferno." Like all his later workspaces, this one became a meeting place for friends, including artists Larry Russell (b. 1932), Don Vincent (1932-1993), and Bernice Vincent (1934-2016). The parties were legendary.

In September 1957 Curnoe began three years of study at the Ontario College of Art in Toronto. It was not a good fit. Curnoe recalled, "OCA was dull. It was also sterile. The instructors were formalists, pure and simple . . . OCA was into form and nothing more. They'd forgotten about content. I guess I was in a rebellious mood but you can only talk about a certain shade of grey for so long."¹ In fact, Curnoe failed his final year. Somewhat chastened, he returned home. However, those years in Toronto had been productive in other ways. In December 1957 he had helped found the Garret Gallery, an artists' cooperative. A chance meeting in 1958 with Michel Sanouillet, one of the world's leading authorities on Dada, was to have a lasting influence, with many subsequent conversations about Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) and French writers, as well as critical support for Curnoe's work.



Greg Curnoe in his first studio in the basement of his childhood home with self-portrait *Selfchildfool*, 1959, photograph by Don Vincent. Behind him are the beginnings of Curnoe's extensive library. Books were always an important source of ideas and information for him.

THE ARTIST IN HIS STUDIO

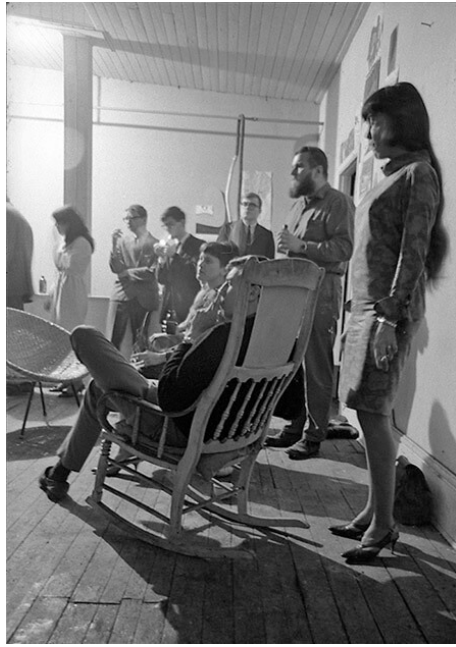
Greg Curnoe returned to London in May 1960 and worked for the summer in the city's Surveys Department. By July, determined to be a full-time artist, he had rented a large space for a studio in downtown London. From that time forward, he supported himself through sales of his work and, when necessary, a variety of part-time jobs. Eventually his income was supplemented by grants and scholarships from the Canada Council for the Arts.

In retrospect, the 1960s could be considered the most productive period of Curnoe's career. At the centre were his studios. Artist John Boyle (b. 1941) remembered: "He renewed old friendships and sought out new people in the university and the community at large. His studio became a centre of intellectual activity where ideas were discussed and plots were hatched."² Canada had

proclaimed a new flag in 1965, and celebrated its centennial and Expo 67 two years later, and those events stimulated debate about Canadian nationalism and a distinctive Canadian identity across the country and likely in Curnoe's studio as well. At the same time, the growing influx of artists, cultural administrators, and academics from the United States, along with a random violent encounter in New York in 1965, fuelled Curnoe's anti-American attitude. As artist and curator Greg Hill pointed out, "Curnoe's nationalism was supported by his regionalism, which was in turn built upon his localism."³

When artist Jack Chambers (1931-1978) returned home to London from Spain in 1961, he and Curnoe became close friends. Other new friends were poet James Reaney and English professor Ross Woodman, who was the first to define the vibrant cultural scene in London in the 1960s as Canadian "regionalism." Writing in *artscanada*, the national magazine of contemporary art, Woodman describes Curnoe as "a visionary who has shaped an authentic myth out of the stuff of his region" and regionalism in London as "essentially a region of the mind." He explained: "Their new regionalism derives in large measure from a desire to avoid the anonymity that they believe awaits those who approach painting as a disinterested problem-solving technical game whose international rules and procedures have been established by the . . . New York School . . . Rejecting the reduction of subject-matter to style, they reach beyond art into life to construct in their work ambiguous images that belong ultimately to neither."⁴ Arts reporter Lenore Crawford, writing insightful reviews in the local newspaper, the *London Free Press*, also became one of Curnoe's most steadfast supporters.

Among the many early works Curnoe produced was the painting *Tall Girl When I Am Sad on Dundas Street*, 1961, which was purchased by the MacKenzie Art Gallery in Regina in 1962. Curnoe, who was just twenty-five years old, had his first work in a public collection.



LEFT: Friends at one of Greg Curnoe's King Street studio parties, 1966, photograph by Don Vincent. Here Hugh McIntyre, a future member of the Nihilist Spasm Band, is second from the right. RIGHT: Greg Curnoe at work in his King Street studio, 1964, with his favourite rocking chair in the background, photograph by Don Vincent.



At the same time that he was laying the groundwork for a successful career as an artist, Curnoe was establishing himself as a husband and father. After a long series of girlfriends, in 1964 Curnoe met British-born Sheila Thompson and in July 1965 they were married. As Sarah Milroy noted, "Curnoe's sexual attraction to Sheila was ferocious, and the impact of their union on his creativity was profound. He found her feral and unpredictable, and he was intrigued by her in a way that for him was unprecedented."⁵



LEFT: Greg Curnoe, *Tall Girl When I Am Sad on Dundas Street*, 1961, oil on Masonite, 182.9 x 121.9 cm, MacKenzie Art Gallery, U. of Regina. RIGHT: Greg Curnoe, *Spring on the Ridgeway*, 1964; oil on plywood and Masonite, rayon/nylon, metal, wood, paper, and string; 187 x 187 cm; Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. Sheila Thompson, who married Greg Curnoe in 1965, was the subject of many works throughout his career.

Curnoe had a willing model and muse in Sheila. Their sons, Owen and Galen, arrived in 1966 and 1968 and their daughter, Zoë, was born in 1971. With the purchase of a former industrial building at 38 Weston Street in London, Curnoe had both a home for his family and a studio for his artistic practice. The family occupied the front of the building; the large studio at the rear had windows overlooking the Thames River valley and Victoria Hospital. The views from those windows inspired many works, including *View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series*, February 10, 1969–March 10, 1971.

Jake Moore, a prominent Canadian businessman and art collector, bought his first Curnoe work in 1964. Both men came from families that had lived in London for several generations; they shared mutual interests and ideas, including a passion for Canada. Moore's extensive collecting of Curnoe's work provided some financial stability for the artist. As art historian Madeline Lennon explained, "They worked out a business-like, but relatively informal, arrangement whereby Moore agreed to purchase a number of finished works. This arrangement has been extended or repeated over the years and it seems to have suited both parties."⁶ Although Curnoe was loath to admit it, Moore was effectively his patron for twenty-eight years. It was Moore who enabled the purchase of the 38 Weston Street property by holding the mortgage, which explains why "Moore" appears among the list of names in Curnoe's *Deeds #2*, 1991.⁷



LEFT: 38 Weston Street, 1995. RIGHT: Greg Curnoe, *38 Weston Street Rear Looking East*, August 2, 1969, ink on paper, 17.5 x 22.5 cm, collection of Megan Walker and Morris Dalla Costa.

NATIONAL ATTENTION

Curnoe became well known beyond London after he met curators Pierre Théberge and Dennis Reid of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. With bravado typical of him, Curnoe had written to the gallery in 1966, asking that it consider purchasing one of his works for its collection. Théberge, the young assistant curator, had never heard of Curnoe and had no idea of the location of London, but he was sent to visit Curnoe's studio. Immediately he was impressed by the artist: "In the course of our conversations, I soon realized that Curnoe was highly cultivated. He had the entire range of modern art history at his fingertips."⁸



LEFT: Cover image of the catalogue for *Heart of London*, 1969, private collection. The catalogue for this touring exhibition was produced as a comic book. RIGHT: Interior page from the *Heart of London* catalogue, 1969, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

The visit resulted in the National Gallery's purchase of *The Camouflaged Piano* or *French Roundels*, 1965-66, which was included in the gallery's centennial exhibition, *300 Years of Canadian Art*. At the opening in May 1967, Curnoe was introduced to Dennis Reid, who later remarked, "[I] remember being not quite sure what to make of his curious mix of hip sophistication and down-to-earth charm."⁹ Curnoe must have made the right impression because early in 1968 Reid included Curnoe in *Canada: Art d'aujourd'hui*, an exhibition that opened in Paris and travelled to Rome, Lausanne, and Brussels.

In his characteristic generous spirit, Curnoe made sure that Théberge visited the studios of other local artists on his trips to London. In 1968 *Heart of London*, a landmark exhibition curated by Théberge, opened at the London Public Library and Art Museum (now Museum London) and toured to eight other small cities, from Charlottetown to Victoria. The National Gallery of Canada was only included on the tour at the last minute. Featured were paintings, sculptures, collages, and constructions by Curnoe and ten other London artists, including Jack Chambers (1931-1978), Murray Favro (b. 1940), John Boyle (b. 1941), Tony Urquhart (b. 1934), and Ed Zelenak (b. 1940). The irreverent spirit of London's artists, captured by the unusual comic-book catalogue, was critically acclaimed.

By 1970 Curnoe's works had been seen across Canada and in four international exhibitions. Art galleries across the country, including the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts; Vancouver Art Gallery; Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; and National Gallery of Canada, had purchased his paintings for their collections.



Greg Curnoe on the phone in the studio at 38 Weston Street, c. 1988-92.

While this was an especially productive art-making period, Curnoe was following his other interests and passions too. In 1969 he began typing his daily journal into a computer at Western University that had been programmed to reflect his stream-of-consciousness style of writing. He envisioned sharing these journals with others, similar to what we do now on Facebook and Twitter. In Paris and in London, U.K., he performed on modified kazoo and drums with the Nihilist Spasm Band. As a cultural activist, Curnoe had taken the lead in founding the small publication *Region* and then alternative galleries—Region Gallery, 20/20 Gallery, and Forest City Gallery—in his hometown to promote the work of local artists. He was also supportive of the establishment of Canadian Artists' Representation/Le front des artistes canadiens (CARFAC), to ensure that artists were fairly compensated.

ON THE MOVE

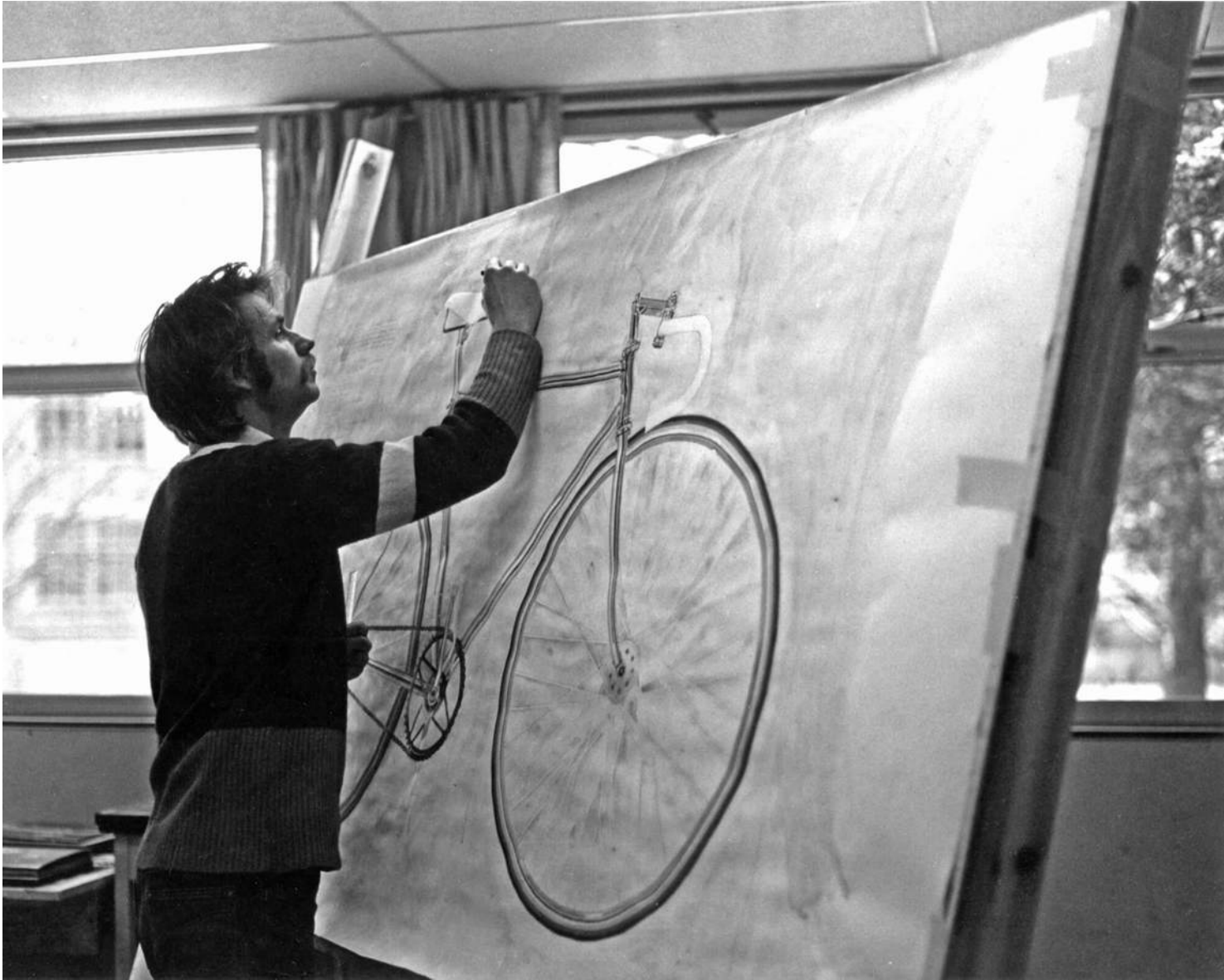
In the spring of 1971 Greg Curnoe rebuilt the CCM bicycle he'd ridden as a teenager, literally changing gears in his life and his work. Initially just forms of transportation, bicycles became a way for Curnoe to express his love of speed, competition, and camaraderie. He bought racing bicycles and joined the London Centennial Wheelers, participating in regular rides and competitions. He won trophies; designed badges, caps, and shirts; and served as president of the club. Not surprisingly, bicycles became the subject of much of his work for the next fifteen years. The first of at least fifteen life-sized bicycle works, the cut-out construction *Self-Portrait with Galen on 1951 CCM*, 1971, is the only one of these that includes a self-portrait and a portrait of his younger son, clearly showing the connection between Curnoe's art and his everyday life.



Greg Curnoe, *Self-Portrait with Galen on 1951 CCM*, 1971, acrylic on plywood, 731 x 666 cm, President's Art Collection, University of Regina (missing from the collection since 1983).

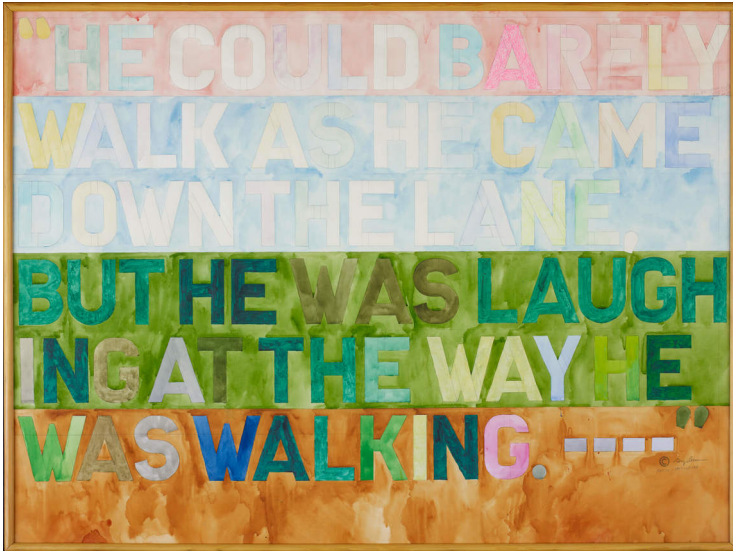
As well as cycling in the London region, Curnoe travelled across Canada as a member of Canada Council for the Arts juries or on short-term teaching assignments at various institutions. He successfully applied for a grant that took him to Baffin Island. In 1971 Curnoe had journeyed from the east to the west coast and from the most southerly point in Canada to the Arctic Circle, wherever possible visiting islands, which he considered bastions of local culture.

Curnoe spent a year at the University of Western Ontario (now Western University) in 1975-76, giving lectures and studio critiques, and interacting with the university community as artist-in-residence. During his tenure he produced approximately three hundred figure drawings, which rekindled his interest in the figure and led to his *Homage to Van Dongen* series. There were also trips to Europe in conjunction with exhibitions such as the 37th Venice Biennale, a major international contemporary art exhibition in which eight of his "window" works were exhibited, including *View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series*, February 10, 1969-March 10, 1971. Curnoe documented all his travels in journals and sketchbooks.

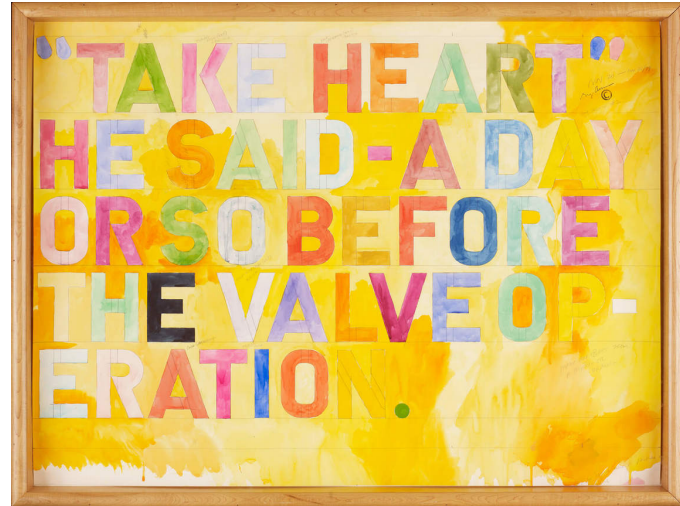


Greg Curnoe painting *Doc Morton*, 1975, in his studio at Western University, London, fall 1975, photograph by Dan Miller. *Doc Morton* was purchased by the London Public Library and Art Museum, now Museum London, in 1976.

After Venice, Pierre Théberge began to work on a retrospective exhibition of Curnoe's work for the National Gallery of Canada, in Ottawa. At the same time, Curnoe was affected by the deaths of a number of men close to him, including fellow cyclist and film critic Martin Walsh (1947-1977); photographer Michel Lambeth (1923-1977); artist Jack Chambers (1931-1978); and artist and writer Selwyn Dewdney (1909-1979). Curnoe painted "obituary" text works for each of them. The decade that had begun with the new focus on cycling ended with the difficult task of looking back over his career for the retrospective exhibition and perhaps contemplating thoughts about his own mortality.



Greg Curnoe, *For Jack #2*, July 22–September 20, 1978, watercolour and pencil on wove paper, 102.6 x 138.4 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.



Greg Curnoe, *For Selwyn #2*, November 20–26, 1979, watercolour and pencil on wove paper, 84.5 x 114 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

RETROSPECTIVE BLUES

Greg Curnoe was a national figure by the time the touring exhibition *Greg Curnoe: Rétrospective/Retrospective* opened in 1981 at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, where Pierre Thérberge had become chief curator. The exhibition received mixed reviews, many of them negative. *Globe and Mail* art critic John Bentley Mays wrote scathingly: "The work itself, the actual body of work left over at the end of a hard day of sloganeering, is neither strong nor important enough to pull this retrospective clear of the mire of coarse anti-Americanism, endless ad-hominem attacks on his critics . . . and regionalist sentimentality in which he planted his feet and took his stand, for better or worse, more than two decades ago."¹⁰

After the retrospective closed, Curnoe was disheartened and could not paint. Then, in Vancouver in 1982, he was blindsided by art historian Serge Guilbaut's public criticism that Curnoe was objectifying his wife in his nude portraits. It was hard for Curnoe to realize that his concerns had become unfashionable. Cultural nationalism had been replaced by the politics of gender, race, and AIDS. Painting had given way to installation, photography, and video art. He retreated to life-sized portraits of himself, his wife, his children, and even the family dog.



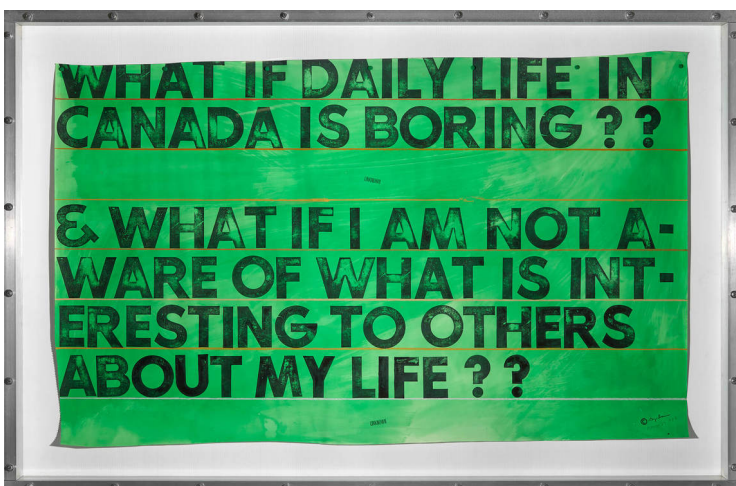
Installation view of *Greg Curnoe: Rétrospective/Retrospective* exhibition, 1981, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, photograph by Greg Curnoe.



LEFT: Greg Curnoe, *Owen*, June 21, 1983–February 15, 1984, watercolour and pencil on paper, 183 x 108.5 cm, Museum London. CENTRE: Greg Curnoe, *Zoë*, December 6, 1984–May 12, 1986, pastel and pencil on paper, 194 x 90 cm, Museum London. RIGHT: Greg Curnoe, *Galen*, February 12–November 26, 1984, watercolour and pencil on paper, 201 x 110 cm, Museum London.

But in 1986 he embarked on new text works shown the next year in an exhibition at the artist-run gallery YYZ in Toronto. Curnoe was obviously questioning his approach. As he wrote in the work *Doubtful Insight*, March 23, 1987: "What if I am not aware of what is interesting to others about my life?"

His new work seemed to have struck a chord, and the decade ended with positive reviews of his exhibition *Rubber Stamped Books and Works 1961–1989* at Art Metropole, an artist-run space in Toronto. Curnoe's work was introduced to a younger generation of artists, while the publication of *Blue Book #8*, a nihilist self-portrait, meant a wider dissemination of his lettered work.



Greg Curnoe, *Doubtful Insight*, March 23, 1987; gouache, watercolour, stamp pad ink, pastel on wove paper; 117.8 x 190.5 cm; Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. The AGO catalogues this work as *What If Daily Life in Canada Is Boring?* though Curnoe titles it *Doubtful Insight* in his personal slides.



Installation view of rubber-stamped books and works from 1961 to 1989, Art Metropole, Toronto, detail of photograph by Greg Curnoe, 1989. Curnoe's reflection as he takes the photograph is visible in the glass.

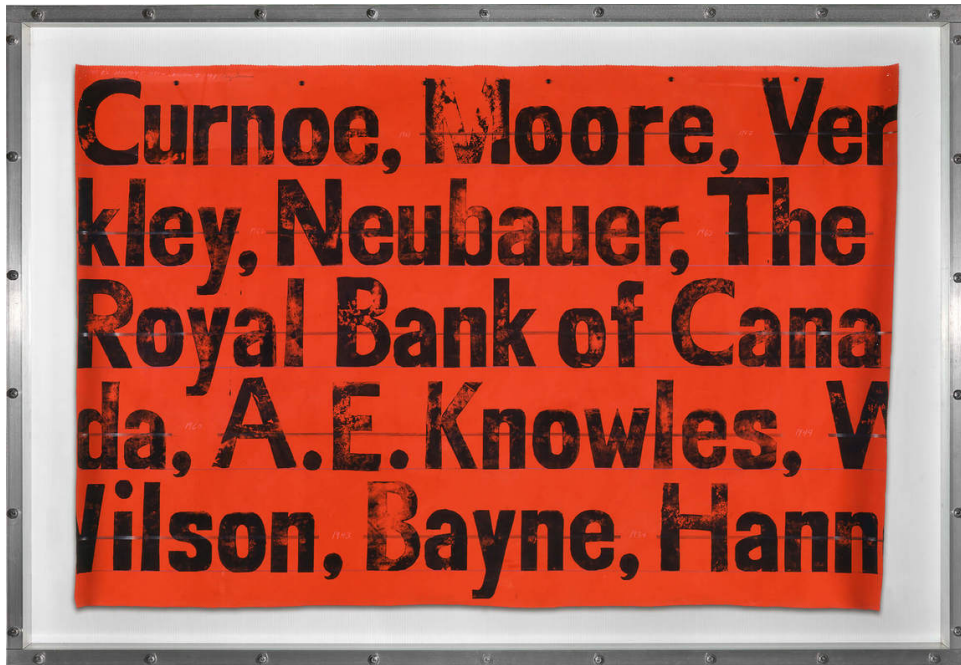
DIGS AND DEEDS

In 1980 a dispute over the location of the property line at 38 Weston Street had prompted Greg Curnoe to research the history of his lot. Ten years later he started to trace the records as far back as he could. Curnoe wondered whether indigenous people had lived on the land he now owned, but finding that local historians knew nothing about the pre-colonial cultures in the region, he began to research the subject himself. Working feverishly, as was his wont when possessed by an idea, Curnoe painstakingly traced the history of the lot and his neighbourhood as far back as 8600

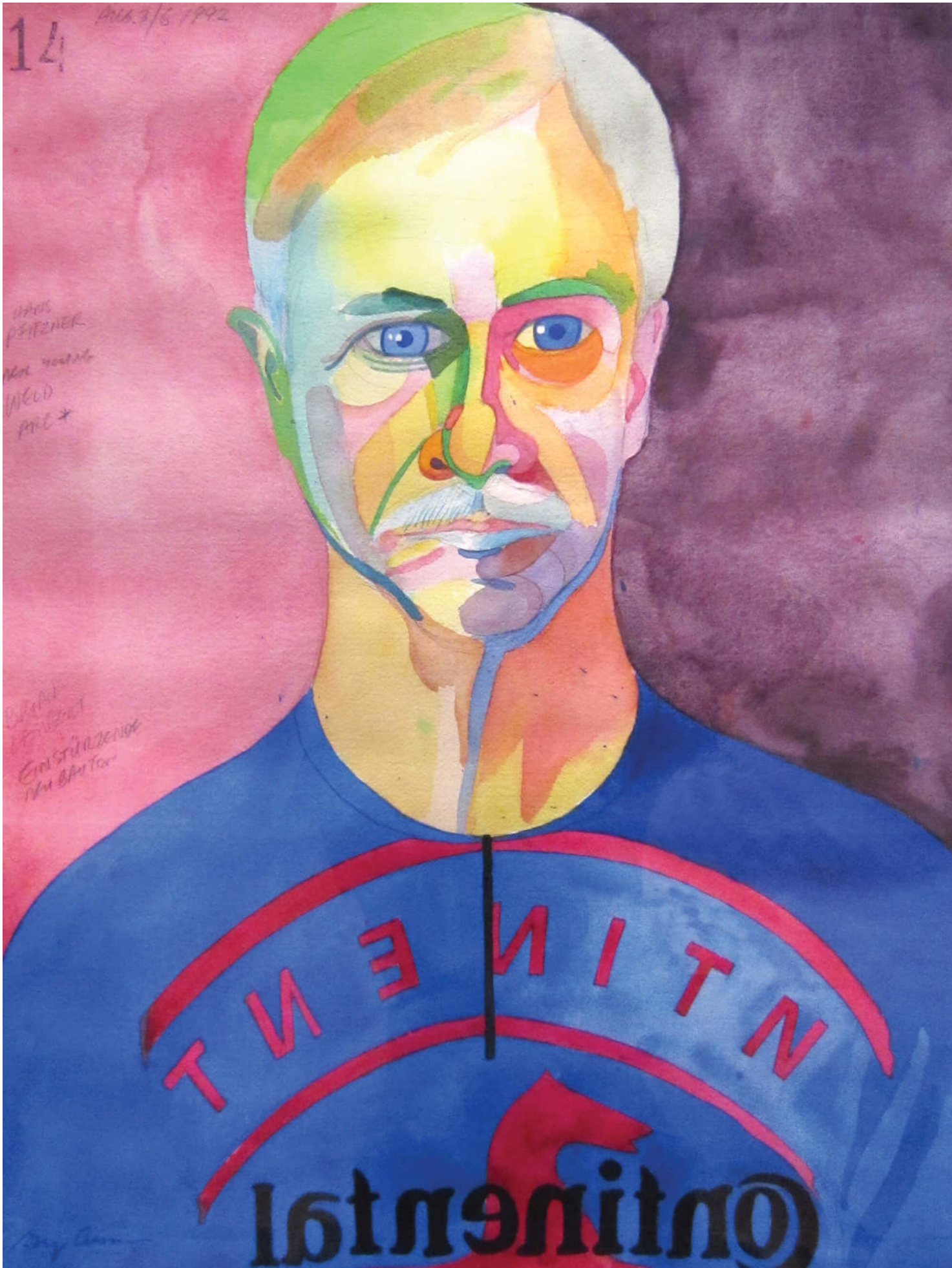
BCE through public records, histories, and interviews. From this material he created the *Deeds* series of five large text works and, concurrently, organized the information he collected on a home computer in preparation for writing a book about his findings.

Everything came to an abrupt stop on Saturday, November 14, 1992. On a regular outing with the London Centennial Wheelers, riding his favourite yellow Mariposa bike, Curnoe was killed when he was hit from behind by a pickup truck. The news ricocheted through London and across the country.

Several days after Curnoe's death, many people in the art community were startled to receive an exhibition invitation that read poignantly, "I am UOY: Greg Curnoe, Self Portraits."¹¹ Sheila Curnoe decided that the show at the Wynick/Tuck Gallery in Toronto should open as originally scheduled, exactly one week after his death. The artist was present only in his recent self-portraits.



Greg Curnoe, *Deeds #2*, January 5, 1991–January 7, 1991; stamp pad ink, pencil, blue pencil, and gouache on paper; 108 x 168.9 cm; private collection.



Greg Curnoe, *Self-Portrait #14*, 1992; watercolour, pencil, and stamp pad ink on paper; 61 x 46 cm; private collection. Curnoe painted this self-portrait while looking at his reflection in a mirror. The letters on the T-shirt are reversed, except for the "N" on the far right. "Continental" refers to a brand of bicycle tire but might also have reminded Curnoe of the continentalism vs. nationalism debates of the 1960s.



KEY WORKS

Greg Curnoe's works were always personal and particular, a fusion of his art and his life, laced with humour, irony, and an anti-establishment attitude. From painting to assemblage, rubber stamping to collage, small and intimate to the truly monumental, his oeuvre is astonishing in its breadth and depth. At the same time, the autobiographical nature of his work means that it features many reappearing ideas, concerns, and approaches.

DRAWER FULL OF STUFF 1961

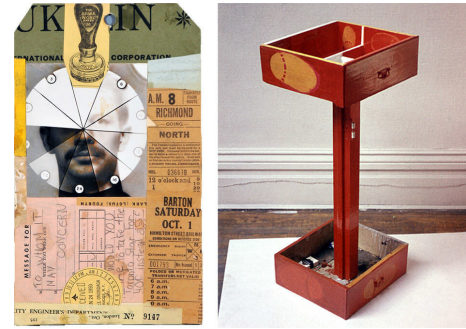


Greg Curnoe, *Drawer Full of Stuff*, 1961
Assemblage (found objects in drawer) on wood (painted wood drawer),
16 x 30.4 x 36.5 cm
Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto

Drawer Full of Stuff is an excellent example of Greg Curnoe's interest in Dada art from early in his career. A "readymade" in the tradition of French artist Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968), one of the most influential artists of the twentieth century, the work is literally a kitchen drawer acquired from a friend, filled with a collection of the "stuff" of Curnoe's life. His penchant for list making appears here in the detailed record of the thirty-one items in the drawer. There are disparate items such as a "wallpaper roller left by Grandpa Porter" and a "shaving bomb from the medicine cabinet (still good)." Curnoe valued the "things" of his personal history and used them throughout his life to create his art.

This work was exhibited in *An Exhibition of Things*, Curnoe's first solo exhibition in London, Ontario, in 1961 and then immediately afterward in the famous untitled Neo-Dada group exhibition at the Isaacs Gallery in Toronto. Commenting on this piece in a review of the exhibition, Dada scholar Michel Sanouillet wrote, "Greg Curnoe displays an exciting genius and freshness of approach. From London, Ontario, a most improbable Dadaistic town, he brought a drawer filled with odds and ends such as we all conceal in the non-public corners of our Gracious Living Homes . . . It indicates a healthy reaction against a lethal form of stuffy conservatism which has pervaded most of this country's artistic circles."¹

One can only imagine the shaking of heads when this work was first exhibited in the art gallery of a library in east-end London.



LEFT: Greg Curnoe, *Self-Portrait from "Art Store Fixture,"* 1961, ink and collage, 30 x 25 cm, Museum London. RIGHT: Greg Curnoe, *A Pair of Drawers,* 1961; construction, oil on wood; 56 x 56 x 152 cm; location unknown.

MYSELF WALKING NORTH IN THE TWEED COAT 1963



Greg Curnoe, *Myself Walking North in the Tweed Coat*, 1963
Oil on plywood, 183.2 x 122.2 cm
Vancouver Art Gallery

Greg Curnoe's self-portraits are a pictorial diary. Whereas his journals are the notes of an observer, without introspection or emotion, in his self-portraits we find more self-scrutiny. This life-sized, full-length self-portrait from early in Curnoe's career is an example of his signature style, a style with affinities to American and British Pop art, yet Curnoe's own. The flat, vivid colours; schematic outlines; and text all come from his love of the comic book. In contrast, the pattern of the tweed coat is detailed, with strands of colour carefully applied in small stripes, a direct reference to *Hilda and I at Burghclere*, 1955, a painting by Stanley Spencer (1891–1959). This juxtaposition of pattern, especially stripes and checks, to flat shapes is a hallmark of Curnoe's work in the 1960s.

Also representative of his work are the stamped texts. To the right of the head, like thoughts in a speech balloon, Curnoe lists "CHRIST THE BLACKHAWKS" (referring to the Chicago hockey team), "BLUE OF THE ZENITH" (the name of his favourite intense blue hue), and "MARY WORTH" (the title of a long-running comic strip). The words "LOVE DOESN'T LAST VERY LONG BUT THINKING ABOUT IT DOES" appear across the top, the statement of a young man infatuated with women. The lines in French around the edge of the black semi-circle are from the poem "Alouettes" by Symbolist poet Saint-Pol-Roux (1861–1940). Although they are a surprising choice for a unilingual Londoner, the lines attest to Curnoe's deep interest in poetry.

Here Curnoe exudes a brash, youthful self-confidence. He wears his customary orange pants and a complementary blue sweater—a colour combination he returned to frequently in his work—set off by a stylish sixties tweed coat.¹ The mannequin-like profile with no modelling is characteristic of his figure work in the early 1960s, a striking contrast to his later, more representational, portraits, including two full-length self-portraits made when he felt his career and his marriage were in trouble. *Middle-Aged Man in LCW Riding Suit*, 1983, and *What's Good for the Goose Is Good for the Gander*, 1983, show a man ill at ease with himself.



LEFT: Greg Curnoe, *Middle-Aged Man in LCW Riding Suit*, 1983, watercolour and pencil on paper, 196 x 177 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. RIGHT: Jack Chambers, *Diego Sleeping No. 2*, 1971, oil on wood, 121.9 x 121.9 cm, collection of TD Bank Group.



The Vancouver Art Gallery purchased this painting in 1964, just after *Lacrosse at Talbot Street School*, 1963, was acquired by the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, and validated Curnoe's choice of art as a career. A framed poster of this work can be seen in the painting *Diego Sleeping No. 2*, 1971, by his close friend Jack Chambers.

FOUR PIECE SET 1965–67



Greg Curnoe, *Four Piece Set*, 1965–67

Collage, stamp pad ink on card, Plexiglas, screws, cup washers, screw eyes on painted wood

Nose A, 51 x 41.4 cm (May 25, 1966); *Moustache #7*, 21.2 x 45 cm (December 5, 1965);

Lip and Chin #1, 17.5 x 20.6 cm (July 3, 1967); *Tie #5*, 54.5 x 24.1 cm (July 3, 1967)

Museum London

After several years of producing conventional collages, Greg Curnoe created more than fifty shaped collages, or “cutouts,” between 1965 and 1968. Most represent facial parts—eyes wearing round glasses attached to noses, moustaches (Curnoe was famous for his luxuriant one), lips, and chins. He eventually combined some of these shapes into six sets, adding ties to suggest larger-than-life, cartoonish characters. This four piece set represents the culmination of Curnoe’s interest in collage.

Inspired by his fondness for Dada, especially the collages of Kurt Schwitters (1887–1948), here he developed his own original approach, creating another form of autobiography or self-portrait. To produce these cutouts, the paper shapes were pre-cut to fit onto painted, shaped wooden supports, then collaged pieces from his collection of paper ephemera were trimmed to the edges of the paper and placed on the support. Shaped Plexiglas was then screwed on top for protection, making the frame integral to the work and creating three-dimensional objects. *R 34*, a film by Jack Chambers (1931–1978), shows Curnoe at work on these collages.



Greg Curnoe's studio with *Moustache #14*, one of the artist's cutout collages, c. 1968, photograph by Don Vincent.

Artist Robert Fones (b. 1949) observed, “These cutout collages . . . represent Curnoe’s mind, his perceptions, his memories and the connections he makes between items he chose to put together in any one collage.”¹ In this four piece set, we can see how the collaged elements are carefully chosen: two circular shapes are glued where eyes would be, reinforced by the round screws; complementary colours are juxtaposed; the black stripe of the corned-beef label suggests the bridge of the nose; the striped paper is placed on the shirt collar.

Curnoe would continue to use collage and assemblage in some of his later works, such as *View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series*, February 10, 1969–March 10, 1971, but this series represents his most fully realized and original use of these techniques, his most unusual self-portraits.

THE CAMOUFLAGED PIANO OR FRENCH ROUNDELS 1965–66

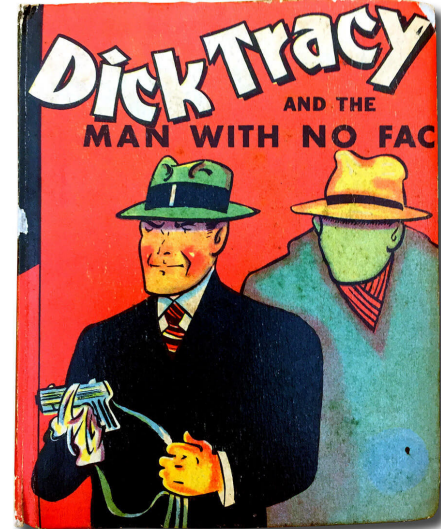


Greg Curnoe, *The Camouflaged Piano or French Roundels*, 1965–66
 Oil on plywood with hotel sign with incandescent lights, 259.7 x 372.1 x 29 cm
 National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

The first of many works by Greg Curnoe acquired by the National Gallery of Canada, *The Camouflaged Piano or French Roundels* overwhelms the viewer with its dazzling, pulsating colours and very large scale. This mixed-media piece has many of the elements that would become Curnoe's hallmarks: a found object (the hotel sign); comic-book style (the Dick Tracy character on the right-hand side); flat, brilliant, non-local colours (for example, the green hands and hair of the piano player); and unrelated texts and visual references (what is an airship doing in the hotel bar?).

Curnoe described this work as a “juxtaposition—of things and events that interest me—without any logical order.”¹ The musicians are two of Curnoe’s friends, and the figure on the right is sculptor Robert Murray (b. 1936). Why Murray appears as a Dick Tracy character, or even why he was included since he had not yet met Curnoe, is unclear. The salvaged hotel sign complete with pigeon droppings and six light bulbs suggests the York Hotel in London, Ontario, where Curnoe and his friends in the Nihilist Spasm Band played on Monday nights for years. The British R 34, the first airship to cross the Atlantic non-stop, is floating over the piano. The tail of the *Hindenburg*, a German airship, disappears nose-first out of the bottom of the frame, perhaps alluding to its disastrous last flight in 1937.

The text around all four edges references jazz, flying aces, and revolutionaries, yet does not explain the title. Although there is a camouflaged piano, there are British but no French roundels (the national insignia used on military aircraft). Curnoe never explained this paradox, but it is typical of his humour.



Greg Curnoe collected comic books, and he modelled the figure of Robert Murray on the figures featured on the cover of *Dick Tracy and the Man with No Face* by Chester Gould, which was published in 1938.

HOMAGE TO THE R 34 [THE DORVAL MURAL] 1967–68



Greg Curnoe, *Homage to the R 34* [the Dorval mural], October 1967–March 1968

Bostik urethane enamel paint on plywood and steel, propellers, metal screens, and electric motors, 26 panels of irregular dimensions installed in three units:

295 x 1551 x 25.5 cm; 195 x 1109.9 x 25.5 cm; 191.5 x 492.7 x 2.5 cm (overall length 32.2 m)

Commissioned by the Department of Transport, Ottawa, for the Montreal International Airport, Dorval, Quebec; collection of National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, since 1998

Homage to the R 34 is the largest work Greg Curnoe produced. Part of a program to “decorate” airports across Canada, it was commissioned for the international arrivals tunnel at Montreal International Airport in Dorval, Quebec. Curnoe’s proposal to depict the life-sized gondolas that carried passengers and crew under the R 34 airship, the first dirigible to cross the Atlantic non-stop in 1919, was accepted by the jury of five art experts, including Jean Boggs, the director of the National Gallery of Canada. The R 34 appears in Curnoe’s earlier work *The Camouflaged Piano or French Roundels*, 1965–66, and fellow artist Jack Chambers (1931–1978) made a film entitled *R 34*, about Curnoe, his life, and the making of this work.

Curnoe created twenty-six panels, some with cut-out edges, and applied bright colours in his characteristic large, flat, comic-book style, overlaid with his trademark stripes. The “passengers” in the gondolas are portraits of friends, family, and the family cat, juxtaposed with historic figures such as the captain of the R 34, Major G.H. Scott; Louis Riel, the leader of two Métis resistance movements; and Paul Joseph Chartier, the mad bomber who failed in his attempt to blow up the Canadian House of Commons in 1966.

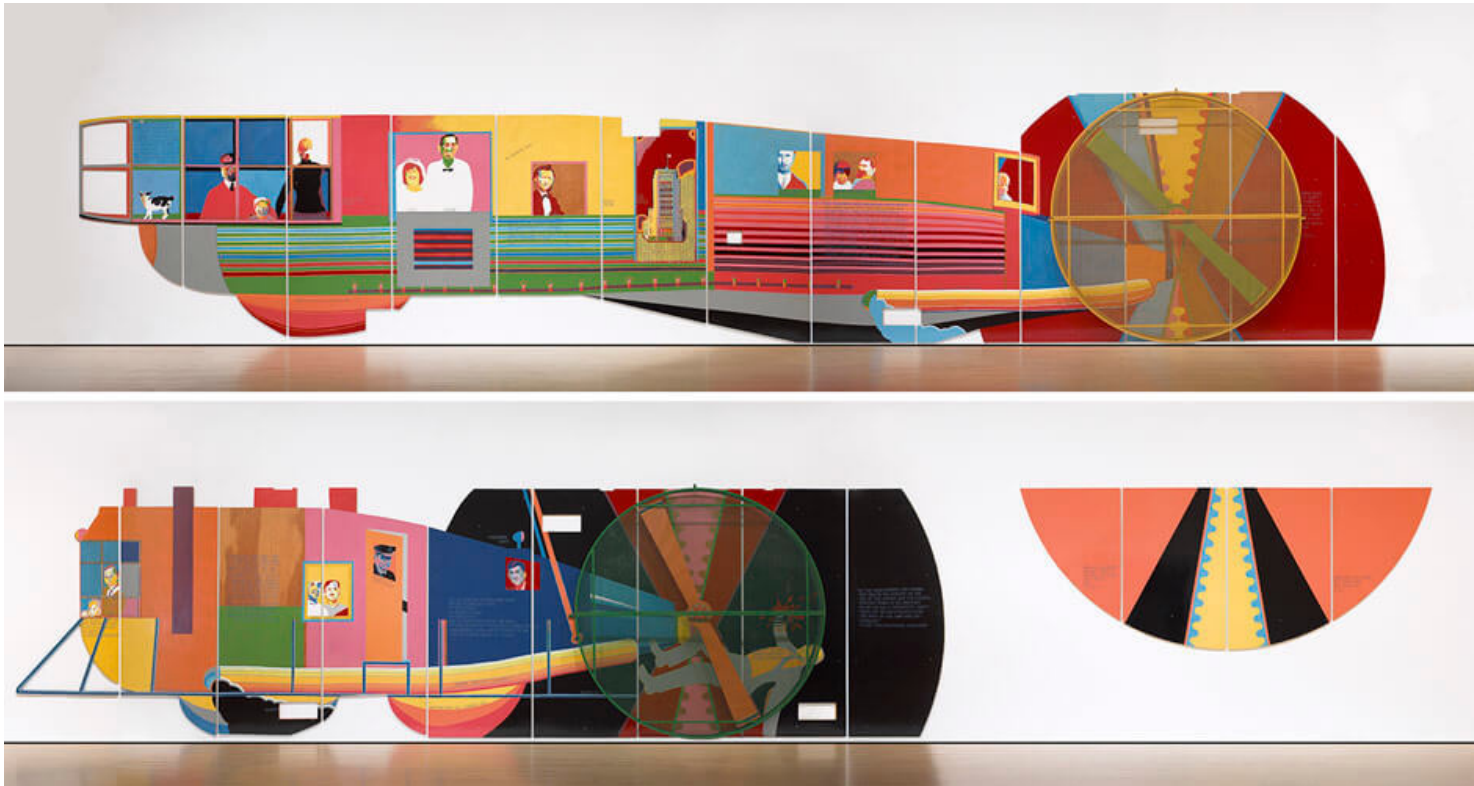
This work would have been visually disconcerting at the time, especially compared with the other, mostly abstract works that were also commissioned for Canadian airports from more senior artists, including Jean-Paul Riopelle (1923–2002), Ronald Bloore (1925–2009), Brian Fisher (1939–2012), and Fernand Leduc (1916–2014). When installation of the work began on March 20, 1968, complaints from the RCMP and airport personnel about the content ensued almost immediately. Texts referencing the draft-dodger Muhammad Ali, the bombing of a British kindergarten during the First World War, and a page from Curnoe’s journal were viewed as anti-American or inappropriate for the location. Moreover, Curnoe’s depiction of a man falling out of the second gondola with his hand severed by the propeller bore an uncanny likeness to U.S. president Lyndon Johnson, though Curnoe claimed it was of a neighbour.



A controversial panel of *Homage to the R 34* showing text from the book *WW I* by Hanson W. Baldwin that includes an eyewitness account of the July 13, 1917, attack by German Gotha bombers on a London, U.K., Infants (kindergarten) classroom. Portraits are of artist Tony Urquhart and his son Marsh.

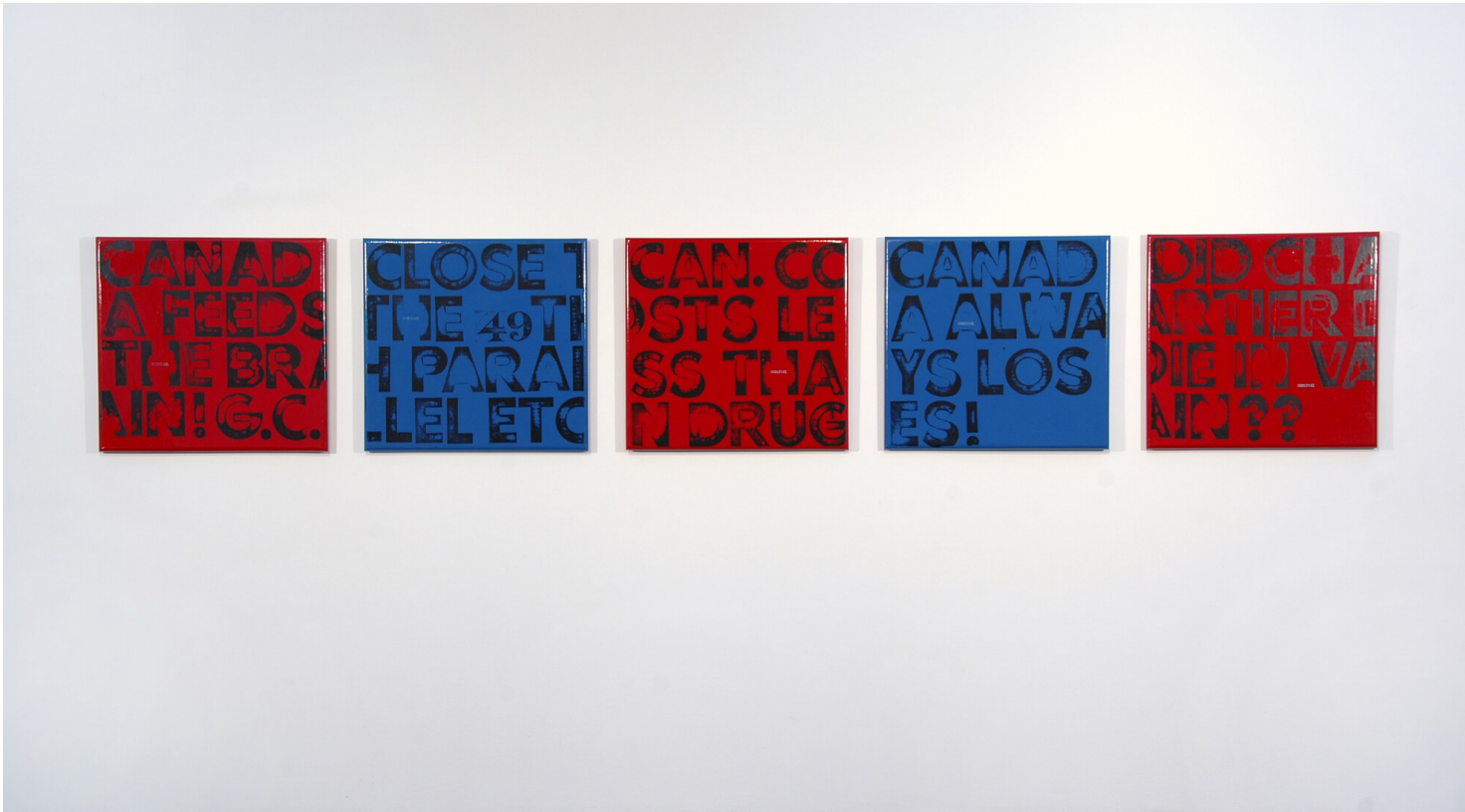
Conceived in the middle of the Vietnam War, the work was an anti-war statement according to Curnoe. After four days of discussion, however, the jury recommended the mural be removed and stored at the National Gallery of Canada.

In a final quirk of fate, Curnoe's mural, in the collection of the National Gallery since 1998, is one of the few artworks commissioned in the 1960s for Canadian airports that still exists. The others met a variety of fates, from vandalism to mysterious disappearance to being gifted to a foreign government. The Dorval mural remains an important example of art censorship.



Details of *Homage to the R 34*.

THE TRUE NORTH STRONG AND FREE, #1-5 1968



Greg Curnoe, *The True North Strong and Free, #1-5*, 1968

Stamp pad ink and polyurethane on paper on plywood

Five panels, each panel (max.) 60 x 63.5 cm

Museum London

The series *The True North Strong and Free, #1-5* was painted immediately after Greg Curnoe's mural *Homage to the R 34*, October 1967-March 1968, was removed from Montreal International Airport in Dorval, Quebec. Using large-scale rubber stamps for the first time, Curnoe expresses his reaction to the criticism of his anti-American sentiments and the censorship of his major work, as well as some disappointment: "CANADA ALWAYS LOSES!"

Curnoe's phrase "CLOSE THE 49th PARALLEL ETC," an allusion to the geographic line that forms the international boundary between part of Canada and the United States, is characteristic of his developing pro-Canadian, anti-American stance and it caught the imagination of other nationalists at a time of debate about increasing American influence on Canada. For example, editor Ian Lumsden used it as the title of a 1970 anthology *Close the 49th Parallel etc: The Americanization of Canada*. Curnoe also put this phrase (in both English and French) on his first Mariposa bicycle and further developed this theme in his satirical *Map of North America*, 1972.

Curnoe had used rubber-stamped texts in his work right from the start of his career. As early as 1961, he sometimes eliminated images in favour of text, probably under the influence of both Dada and Kurt Schwitters (1887-1948). These works might describe the view out his studio window, or list words on his mind. Art critic John Noel Chandler was the first to note that Curnoe had been doing Conceptual art before the term was used to describe the explosion of text-based art later in the 1960s.¹



Cover of Ian Lumsden's *Close the 49th Parallel etc.: The Americanization of Canada*, 1970. For the cover, the colour of Greg Curnoe's original painting has been changed to an orange that contrasts with the blue stripes.

VIEW OF VICTORIA HOSPITAL, SECOND SERIES 1969–71



Greg Curnoe, *View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series*, February 10, 1969–March 10, 1971

Oil, rubber stamp and ink, graphite, and wallpaper on plywood, in Plexiglas strip frame, with audiotape, tape player, loudspeakers, and eight-page text (photocopied from a rubber-stamped notebook), 243.8 x 487 cm
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

The windows in Greg Curnoe's new studio at 38 Weston Street gave him a view across the Thames River in London, Ontario, to Victoria Hospital. Not only was this the dominant feature on the landscape, it was the place where he and so many of his family and friends had been born or had died, and he began four series on the subject. The first was the monumental *View of Victoria Hospital, First Series: #1–6*. This work, the second series, was produced just after the first was finished, and the third (two sound recordings, 1969) and fourth (two sketches for the second series glued together) completed his multimedia exploration of the view of the building.¹

View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series is a painted depiction of the view from two panes of a studio window, accompanied by a tape that plays through speakers inserted at the top corners of the painting and an eight-page text typed in the uppercase letters Curnoe favoured. The text, keyed to the numbers on the painting, records the time and date of sights from his window during the two years it took to complete the work. In effect, the text is a journal with daily observations—the lights he saw at night; the birds and insects that flew by; the clouds he viewed; the windows of the rooms where artist Jack Chambers (1931–1978), his father, and others were patients; and the cars and steam shovels that passed by—recorded with painstaking particularity.

The bright, flat colours in this work are arbitrarily chosen. A blue Bromo-Seltzer bottle hangs on the inside of the window frame, and the mullion, which Curnoe almost forgot to add, divides the painting from top to bottom. The effect for the viewer, moving back and forth in front of the very large painting, is an experience on three levels simultaneously—reading, looking, and listening.

Chambers painted his own version of Victoria Hospital, which he had photographed from the roof of Curnoe's studio. At first, the two painted their works back to back in Curnoe's studio, but Chambers, weakened by leukemia, had to complete his painting in his own studio. What resulted were two very different approaches to a "regionalist" subject.



View of Victoria Hospital from Curnoe's studio window, c. 1974, photograph by Greg Curnoe. Note the hanging Bromo-Seltzer bottle, which is depicted in *View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series*.

MAP OF NORTH AMERICA 1972



Greg Curnoe, *Map of North America*, 1972

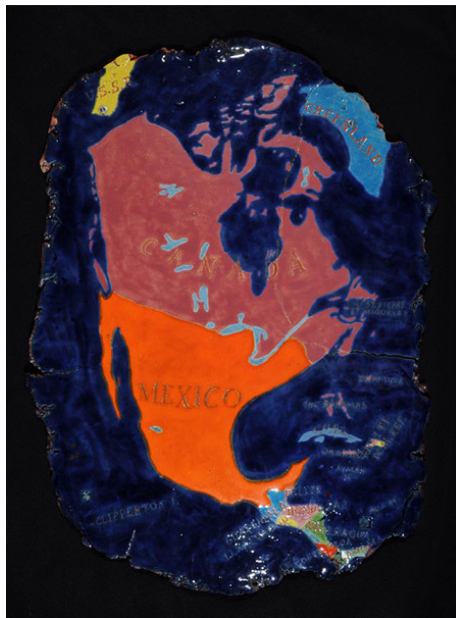
India ink on paper, 29.5 x 22.2 cm

Dalhousie Art Gallery, Dalhousie University, Halifax

In 1972 Greg Curnoe began the first of several maps of North America, most likely in response to a commission to produce a cover for the January 1973 issue of the *Journal of Canadian Fiction*. Drawing on an interest in maps and islands informed by his childhood postage-stamp collection and some professional experience with mapping from a summer job in the City of London Surveys Department, he created this ink drawing. It is significant because it expresses Curnoe's strong anti-Americanism by eliminating the United States entirely, yet naming islands, from Greenland to the obscure Clipperton Island, an uninhabited coral atoll in the Pacific Ocean that is well known to ham radio operators.

Curnoe remembered learning about various historic Canadian border disputes: "The teachers in public school all talked about the Alaska Panhandle . . . and how the United States got that and the Oregon Territory and that bump of Maine that goes up into New Brunswick."¹ Then, through the 1960s, he was aware of the intense debates raging in Canada about the virtues of nationalism versus continentalism or internationalism. A commission into the arts, letters, and sciences in Canada, led by Vincent Massey, had warned as early as 1951 of the dangers of American influence on media and publishing. Curnoe, living in London, Ontario, less than two hundred kilometres from the U.S. border, witnessed firsthand the influx of American branch plants and university professors to Canada. His personal anti-Americanism had been further reinforced when a friend was violently mugged in New York City in 1965. He made headlines through humour and irony, such as with his 1970 statement, "All Canadian atlases must show Canada's southern border to be with Mexico. Bridges & tunnels must be built between Canada & Mexico."²

In redrawing the map of North America, Curnoe may well have been aware of the 1929 Surrealist map of the world by an anonymous artist who redrew the continents, eliminating the United States completely. Here he makes his own tongue-in-cheek statement that fits his views about cultural imperialism. Sheila Curnoe recalls her husband coming into their kitchen after he had successfully connected Mexico to the Canadian border: "He was so pleased with himself. He was laughing about it. It was meant to be funny and not to be taken so seriously."³ Although Curnoe made other versions of this map, this is the one that has been most exhibited, especially as an example of Conceptual art.



LEFT: Greg Curnoe, *Untitled*, 1990, fired clay with glaze, 68 x 50 x 2 cm, Museum London. RIGHT: Greg Curnoe, *America*, July 1989, trial proof II state 2, colour lithograph on wove paper, printed by Don Holman, 73.9 x 57.6 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.



MARIPOSA 10 SPEED NO. 2 1973



Greg Curnoe, *Mariposa 10 Speed No. 2*, 1973

Watercolour over graphite on wove paper, 101.1 x 181.4 cm

National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

Of all the works he created, Greg Curnoe is perhaps best known for his paintings of bicycles. He had taken up competitive cycling in 1971, purchasing two racing bicycles, a Spanish Zeus and a French Gitane. He discovered that he could order a custom-made, hand-built *Canadian* racing bicycle. When he went to pick up his Mariposa ten-speed in Toronto, he applied black peel-and-stick letters to the top tube of the bright yellow bike—"CLOSE THE 49th PARALLEL ETC" on one side and "FERMEZ LE 49E PARALLÈLE ETC" on the other.

Following two actual-sized, cut-out paintings of the Zeus in acrylic on plywood in 1972, Curnoe created two full-scale watercolours, the largest of this medium he had attempted to date, of each profile of his new Mariposa, always his favourite bicycle. *Mariposa 10 Speed No. 2* is his portrait of the bike with the English lettering visible.¹ These works were an enormous technical challenge, and Curnoe may have been the only person working in this medium at this scale at that time. Eventually, there would be ten life-sized watercolour portraits of his bicycles, the last painted in 1990.



Curnoe's second Mariposa bicycle, ordered after the first was damaged in a collision, was a bright green "time trial" bike. The watercolour portrait *Mariposa T.T.*, 1978-79, was produced as a serigraph print on Plexiglas in an edition of thirty that is now in collections across the country.

LEFT: One in the edition of Greg Curnoe's *Mariposa T.T.*, 1978-79, in the studio juxtaposed against his collection of bikes, photograph probably by Greg Curnoe, c. 1979.
RIGHT: Greg Curnoe riding one of his bikes, c. 1974, photographer unknown.

Curnoe's series of bicycle works (1971-90) eventually numbered at least fifteen large-scale painted portraits of bikes each with a pencilled listing of the constituent parts: numerous single wheels; two serigraphs on Plexiglas; and many smaller sketches. Posters of these works are still being produced, and with their appeal beyond art circles they continue to introduce new audiences to Curnoe's art.

HOMAGE TO VAN DONGEN #1 (SHEILA) 1978–79

Greg Curnoe, *Homage to Van Dongen #1 (Sheila)*, June 27, 1978 – November 23, 1979

Watercolour and graphite on paper, 152.4 x 243.8 cm

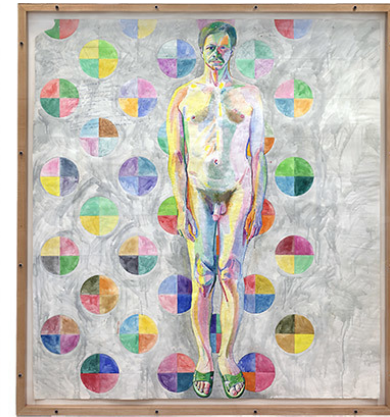
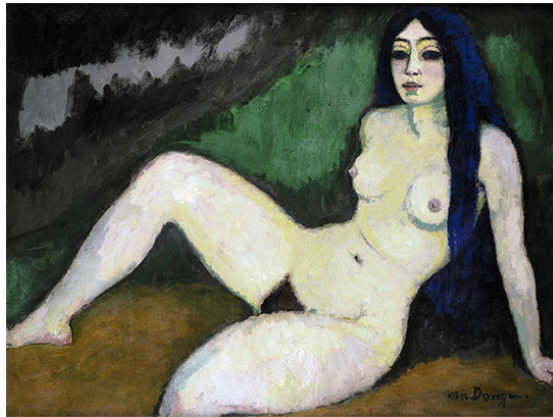
Justina M. Barnicke Gallery at Hart House, Art Museum at the University of Toronto

Greg Curnoe's life-sized nude portrait of his wife, Sheila, is derived from a series of pen-and-ink drawings he produced in 1975 and differs markedly from his other works. There is no political statement, no obvious text, no cartoon-style drawing—instead, a superbly rendered watercolour portrait of his confident, self-possessed wife. The pose used in this large watercolour alludes to *La sirène espagnole*, c. 1912, by the Dutch Fauvist Cornelis "Kees" Van Dongen (1877–1968), but the work also has affinities to modernist works by French painters Édouard Manet (1832–1883) and Henri Matisse (1869–1954). Curnoe uses a more painterly modelling of the figure with his characteristic juxtaposition of pattern to flat areas and complementary colours used to denote shadows.¹

The challenges of working on a large-scale watercolour caused a problem. Unlike oil paint, the transparency of the watercolour medium means that alterations can be obvious. As Curnoe finished this painting, he worried in his journal: "Sheila objects strongly to the face on the large nude . . . What should I do? The painting is of her. She has a say in it & it is a collaboration. The painting is finished and is priced at over \$10,000 . . . Do I take a chance &

wreck [it?]"² Ultimately, Curnoe did not rework the face. While Sheila Curnoe still does not think the painting is a good likeness, she was pleased when it was acquired almost immediately for the collection of Hart House at the University of Toronto.

Curnoe was no stranger to controversy, yet he was genuinely shocked by criticism that other similar portraits of Sheila elicited when they were shown in Vancouver in 1982. Suddenly his nudes had become a lightning rod for feminist critique. He was accused by art historian Serge Guilbaut of objectifying and exploiting his wife, as well as of paying homage to the minor Fauve painter Van Dongen. His immediate response was a life-sized nude watercolour self-portrait, *What's Good for the Goose Is Good for the Gander*, 1983, now in the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. The work is unsettling; the knock-kneed artist stares at us, seemingly floating against a background of multicoloured circles created in the style of French artist Robert Delaunay (1885–1941).



LEFT: Cornelis "Kees" Van Dongen, *La sirène espagnole*, c. 1912, oil on canvas, 97 x 130 cm, private collection. RIGHT: Greg Curnoe, *What's Good for the Goose Is Good for the Gander*, 1983; watercolour, pencil, and ballpoint pen on wove paper; 193.3 x 175 cm; National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

LARGE COLOUR WHEEL 1980



Greg Curnoe, *Large Colour Wheel*, 1980
Watercolour and graphite on paper, 189 x 189 cm
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

Greg Curnoe used circles in various ways throughout his career: as a monoprint (made by inking a long-playing record and pressing it on paper in 1962), as coloured shapes in many paintings, as wheels in his bicycle works of the 1970s, and later as colour wheels like this one. *Large Colour Wheel* clearly indicates the ideas behind Curnoe's fame as a colourist. It is also representative of many works of this period that explored colour theory, including smaller watercolours of wheels, signal flags, and aircraft roundels.

In 1855, French chemist Michel Chevreul had developed a seventy-two-part colour wheel to describe what he called “simultaneous contrast,” the effect on perception of juxtaposed colours, especially complementary colours. One of the first artists to explore this idea was French artist Robert Delaunay (1885–1941). Curnoe had admired Delaunay since his days at H.B. Beal Technical and Commercial High School, in the mid-1950s, and he had seen exhibitions of the French artist’s work in 1965 and 1976. Curnoe had already acknowledged his debt to Delaunay in several works, such as *#1 Iron*, *1st Hole*, *Thames Valley Golf Course with Delaunay Sky*, 1971–78.

With this work Curnoe pays tribute to his antecedents in the study of colour by naming them in chronological order with the date of a significant work: KIRCHNER 1909, DELAUNAY 1912, MATIOUCHINE 1917–18, CAHEN 1955, and TOUSIGNANT 1967.¹ He liked to collect unusual words, and here are HALCYON (calm, peaceful) placed between green and blue, both colours associated with the word, and ACME (perfect) between the perfect complements, blue and orange. SIGNAL FLAGS refers to his series of maritime flags, which used colours that could be easily distinguished at sea. The flag here is in one of his favourite combinations, blue and yellow. The colour wheel itself is Curnoe’s own unscientific version, which plays with the juxtaposition of colours, sometimes complementary, sometimes not. A hole has been carefully cut in the centre of the wheel, so that one looks right through to the wall. Doing so, perhaps the artist intended to emphasize the work as a colour wheel rather than a bicycle wheel.

Immediately after finishing *Large Colour Wheel*, Curnoe began work on *Sanouillet #2*, 1980, which integrated his colour wheel with a bicycle wheel-truing stand, a favourite readymade of the Dada artist Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968). As French Dada scholar Michel Sanouillet noted, “Greg’s fascination with the wheel kept recurring.”²



Greg Curnoe, *Sanouillet #2*, 1980, watercolour on paper, 153.7 x 77.5 cm, Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal. This work alludes to Duchamp’s *Bicycle Wheel*, 1913, the Dada art historian Michel Sanouillet, as well as a truing device, a tool used by cyclists, including Curnoe, to align wheels.

DEEDS #5 1991



Greg Curnoe, *Deeds #5*, August 19-22, 1991

Stamp pad ink, poster paint, graphite, watercolour on paper, 110 x 168 cm

Winnipeg Art Gallery

Greg Curnoe spent much of the last two years of his life tracing the history of his property at 38 Weston Street in London, Ontario, by searching records (deeds and abstracts of the records) and interviewing descendants of European settlers and First Nations inhabitants. This work, the last in a series of five large text works, documents the earliest history, from the Paleo-Indian Period (8600 BCE) to the "No. 2 Surrender" to the Crown of the Ojibwa lands in Southwestern Ontario in 1790.

Curnoe described his startling realization: "We live in a culture where pre-existing cultures lived and live. They have survived in isolation from the culture of the City of London, both within the city and in areas of original settlement that date back to around 1690, fifteen miles away. They have been omitted from most books of local history."¹ In an ironic twist, the anti-American and Canadian patriot was forced to confront the "cultural imperialism" of his own predecessors.



Greg Curnoe, *(Mis)deeds #1*, December 5, 1990–January 9, 1991; stamp pad ink, gouache, blueprint pencil; 108 x 162.6 cm; private collection.

Having documented his research on his newly purchased computer, he found that he had enough material for a book. After his death, his editors divided the original material into two volumes: *Deeds/Abstracts* (1995), the history of his lot, and *Deeds/Nations* (1996), an alphabetical listing of over one thousand First Nations individuals who lived in southwestern Ontario between 1750 and 1850. As archaeologist Neal Ferris explained, "Until Greg Curnoe's monumental effort to track down, follow up and piece together the personal biographies and family histories of the Native people signing the southwestern Ontario land surrenders of the 18th and 19th centuries, little had been done to make sense of who most of those signatories were, or their roles in local and regional communities."²

The artist had extended his notion of regionalism from his backyard and the here and now to what had happened in his region for thousands of years. As he wrote, "I have felt the power of many details adding up to an understanding of the ground I am standing on. It is an understanding that is new to me."³ We can only guess at what might have happened next in his artistic production as a result of this new insight.



SIGNIFICANCE & CRITICAL ISSUES

Greg Curnoe made art from the “stuff” of his everyday life, strongly rejected the idea of moving to “the centre”—Toronto or New York—and was passionately and unapologetically Canadian. Yet from his home in London, Ontario, he was instrumental in fostering and developing a creative milieu that inspired other local artists to produce their own works and put London Regionalism on the map. From his art to his activism, Curnoe often provoked debate.

LONDON REGIONALISM

Greg Curnoe was, without question, at the centre of the art movement known as London Regionalism. In what he called the “backwater” of London, Ontario, Curnoe’s various studios were the gathering places for a group of artists who supported each other but developed distinct styles of their own. If they occasionally used the word “regionalism” to describe themselves, it was entirely without reference to other movements of the same name around the world. It was Curnoe’s desire to ground his art in authentic, local culture—his daily encounters with his surroundings—rather than in the latest international trend. As he wrote in 1963, “We are not using regionalism as a gimmick but rather as a collective noun to cover what so many painters, writers, and photographers have used—their own environment—something we don’t do in Canada very much.”¹

Later, after he had named both a magazine and a gallery “Region,” Curnoe explained that he had been unaware of 1930s American Regionalism: “The idea that London’s developing artistic community was an outgrowth of U.S. regionalism was totally inaccurate.”² What consolidated the group’s name in public consciousness was the National Gallery of Canada’s 1968 landmark *Heart of London* exhibition, which toured smaller cities across Canada with works by John Boyle (b. 1941), Jack Chambers (1931–1978), Greg Curnoe, Murray Favro (b. 1940), Bev Kelly (b. 1943), Ron Martin (b. 1943), David Rabinowitch (b. 1943), Royden Rabinowitch (b. 1943), Walter Redinger (1940–2014), Tony Urquhart (b. 1934), and Ed Zelenak (b. 1940).

Before London Regionalism became widely known, however, Curnoe was the instigator for much of the innovative activity that brought the artists together. In February 1962 he organized *The Celebration*, a Dada-inspired event that caused a sensation in the ultra-conservative city. Toronto artists Michael Snow (b. 1928) and Joyce Wieland (1930–1998), photographer Michel Lambeth (1923–1977), and Dada scholar Michel Sanouillet participated in this first Happening in Canada, which included events such as erecting a huge construction of scrap lumber, doing *tableaux vivants*, and taking part in a short water battle.



Installing the *Young London (A Survey)* exhibition at 20/20 Gallery in London, Ontario, c. December 1966. The exhibition opened on January 3, 1967, photograph by Don Vincent. *Front, from left:* Bernice Vincent, unknown artist; *rear:* Sheila Curnoe, Greg Curnoe, Charles Vincent in stroller, Owen Curnoe sitting on floor.



LEFT: Photograph of *The Celebration*, February 3, 1962, at London Public Library and Art Museum (now Museum London), photograph by Don Vincent. *The Celebration* was the first Happening in Canada. Artist Michael Snow can be seen at right. RIGHT: Poster for *The Celebration*, 1962, offset photolithograph on wove paper, 38.3 x 25.8 cm, photograph by Michel Lambeth. Here Greg Curnoe wears a First World War German helmet and balances a "Ban the Bomb" (peace) symbol on his fingertips.

Another of Greg Curnoe's innovations was the introduction of the artist-run space to London, when he led the founding of the Region Gallery in 1962, so that he and his artist friends could present their own works in uncurated space outside public institutions. He also played leadership roles in the 20/20 Gallery and in the Forest City Gallery. Curnoe explained, "20/20 Gallery was consciously set up as an alternative to the local public art gallery . . . [and] exhibited work that would never have appeared there or in the local commercial galleries."³ It was London's alternative galleries that led the Canada Council for the Arts to fund similar artist-run spaces across Canada in 1967.

During the 1963 Ontario provincial election, Curnoe founded the Nihilist Party of Canada, a party with no platform and no candidates, and signed up his friends as members. For years, Curnoe and his friends used the Nihilist Party as a pretext for socializing and having fun. Curnoe's 1965 short film on the history of the Nihilist Party, *No Movie*, used friends playing kazoos for the soundtrack. The Nihilist Spasm Band followed, using modified and homemade instruments such as kazoos, a megaphone, a gut bucket, a guitar, drums, and a bass. In 1966 the

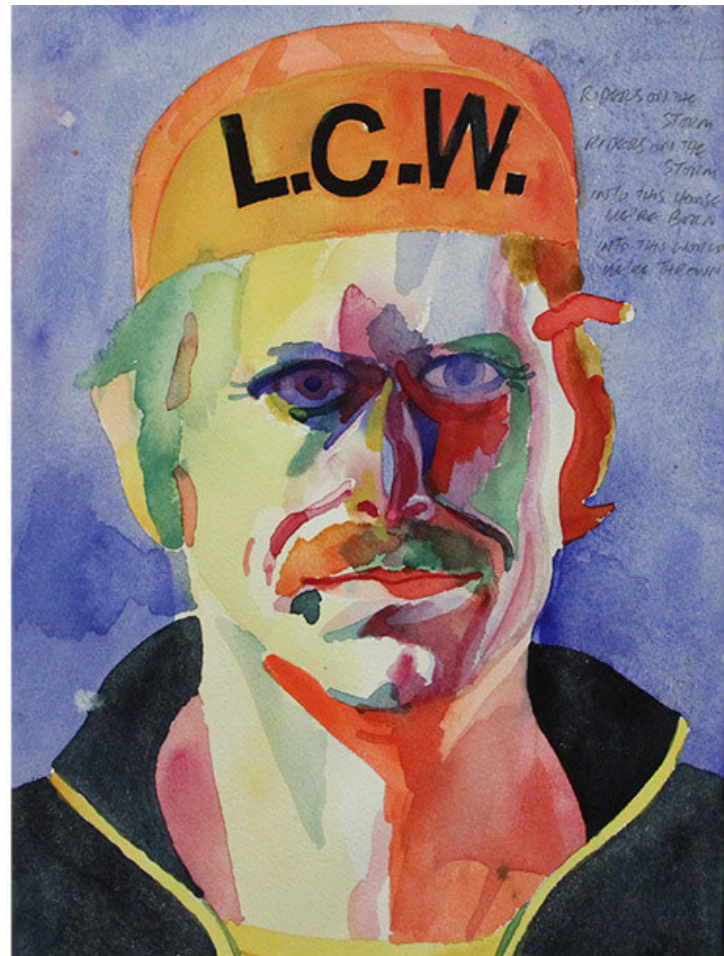
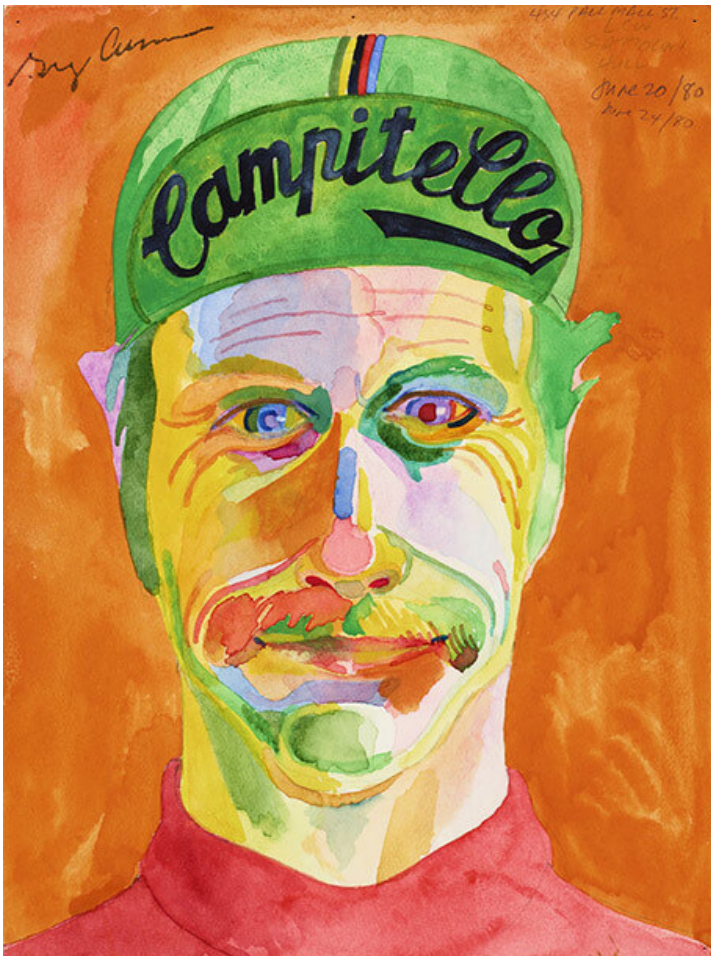


The Nihilist Spasm Band at the York Hotel, 1968, photograph by Ian MacEachern. From left: Hugh McIntyre (bass), Art Pratten (Pratt-A-Various), Archie Leitch (slide clarinet), Murray Favro (guitar), John Clement (guitar), Bill Exley (vocals), John Boyle (kazoo), Greg Curnoe (kazoo and drums).

band began regular Monday-night sessions at London's York Hotel that continue to this day at the Forest City Gallery.

Artists in London, Ontario, were responsible for founding an organization that has had a national impact on artists' rights. In 1968 Jack Chambers (1931–1978), with fellow artists Kim Ondaatje (b. 1928) and Tony Urquhart, founded Canadian Artists' Representation/Le front des artistes canadiens (CARFAC) to ensure that artists were paid fairly for the reproduction and exhibition of their work. One of the first members to join, Curnoe was supportive of this initiative and worked locally, provincially, and federally to advocate for the rights of Canadian artists. John Boyle has noted, "Every artist in Canada can thank him whenever he or she is paid an exhibition fee."⁴

THE SEARCH FOR SELF



LEFT: Greg Curnoe, *Self-Portrait*, 1980, watercolour on paper, 30.5 x 22.5 cm, private collection. RIGHT: Greg Curnoe, *Self-Portrait (L.C.W.)*, May 25–27, 1980, watercolour and pencil on paper, 30.5 x 23 cm, private collection. The letters "L.C.W." on the brim of Curnoe's hat refer to the London Centennial Wheelers, Curnoe's bicycle club.

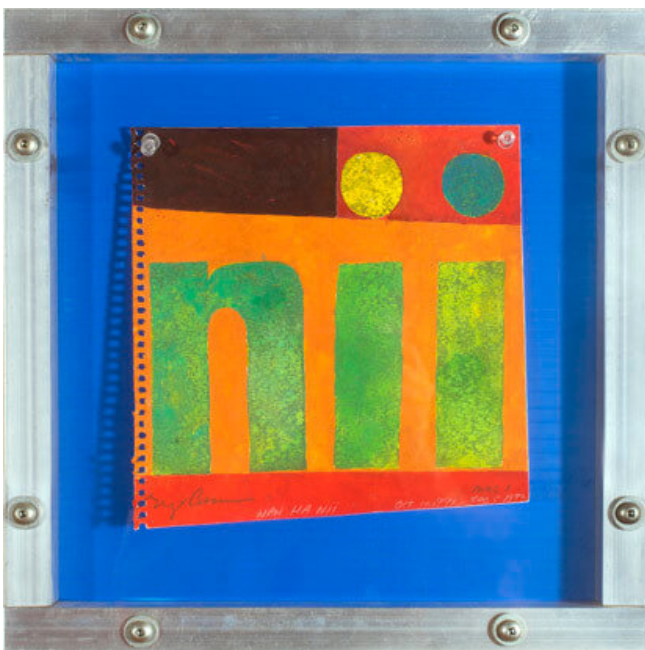
Canadian artist Alex Colville (1920–2013) once said, "The very decision to become an artist means you are egocentric. The basic assumption is that your life is interesting or that you have something to say about life."⁵ All of Curnoe's work was a kind of self-portrait, a painted, stamped, assembled, or written autobiography focusing on sometimes obscure daily details, passions, and concerns. His very public presentation of this evolution—the specific record of a man in his region and his personal interests, politics, and self-portraits—are a major contribution to Canadian art.

Greg Curnoe's interest in the figure began by the age of ten, when he drew cartoons of his family members. Later he painted girls he saw from his studio windows, friends (especially girlfriends), his wife, and his children. His main subject, however, was himself.

From the 1950s to the day before his death, Curnoe made many self-portraits, no doubt inspired by British Regionalist artist Stanley Spencer (1891–1959), whose work and self-portraits he much admired.

Most often Curnoe painted head-and-shoulder views, especially in several watercolour series he created later in his career, as in twelve from 1980 where he is wearing a cycling cap or helmet. He also did full-length self-portraits, including *Myself Walking North in the Tweed Coat*, 1963, *Middle-Aged Man in LCW Riding Suit*, 1983, and the nude self-portrait *What's Good for the Goose Is Good for the Gander*, 1983. Unlike most other artists, however, Curnoe painted no self-portraits showing himself with an easel, palette, or brushes to indicate his profession.

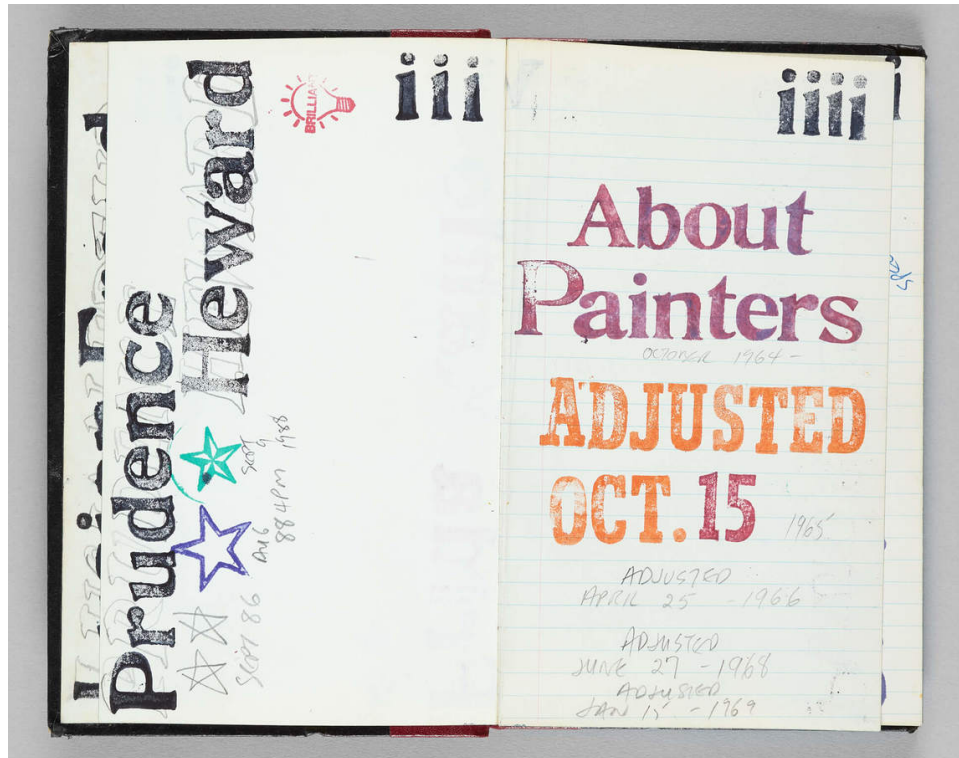
In the last two years of his life, concurrent with his research into indigenous languages, he began a series of more than twenty small, stamped-text self-portraits using the first person in different languages that were important to him—English, French, Ojibwa, Cornish, and Oneida. The work he stamped the night before he was killed was the last in a series that read "i:?" He was still searching for his identity at the end.



LEFT: Greg Curnoe, *Wan Ha Nii*, October 10, 1991–February 5, 1992; watercolour, stamp pad ink, pencil, blueprint pencil; 22.5 x 22 cm; John Labatt Visual Arts Centre, Western University, London. This portrait was torn from a sketchbook, attached with pushpins to a bright blue background, and framed in a custom-made industrial-style aluminum and Plexiglas frame that Curnoe designed for his later works.
RIGHT: Greg Curnoe, *I Wai*, November 11–13, 1992; watercolour, stamp pad ink, pencil on paper; 22.5 x 30.5 cm; private collection.

ALTERNATIVE PERIODICALS

Greg Curnoe was primarily an artist, but words were important both in his works and as an extension of his art practice. He was responsible for inventing and founding four alternative periodicals that provided space for display and discussion outside the mainstream media. The founding editor and publisher of the small magazine *Region*, Curnoe published ten editions between 1961 and 1990. Concerned about the gradual erosion of Canadian culture, in 1974 Curnoe and Pierre Th  berge published one issue of *The Review of the Association for the Documentation of Neglected Aspects of Culture in Canada*, a catalogue for a documentary exhibition of folk art at the London Public Library and Art Museum (now Museum London).

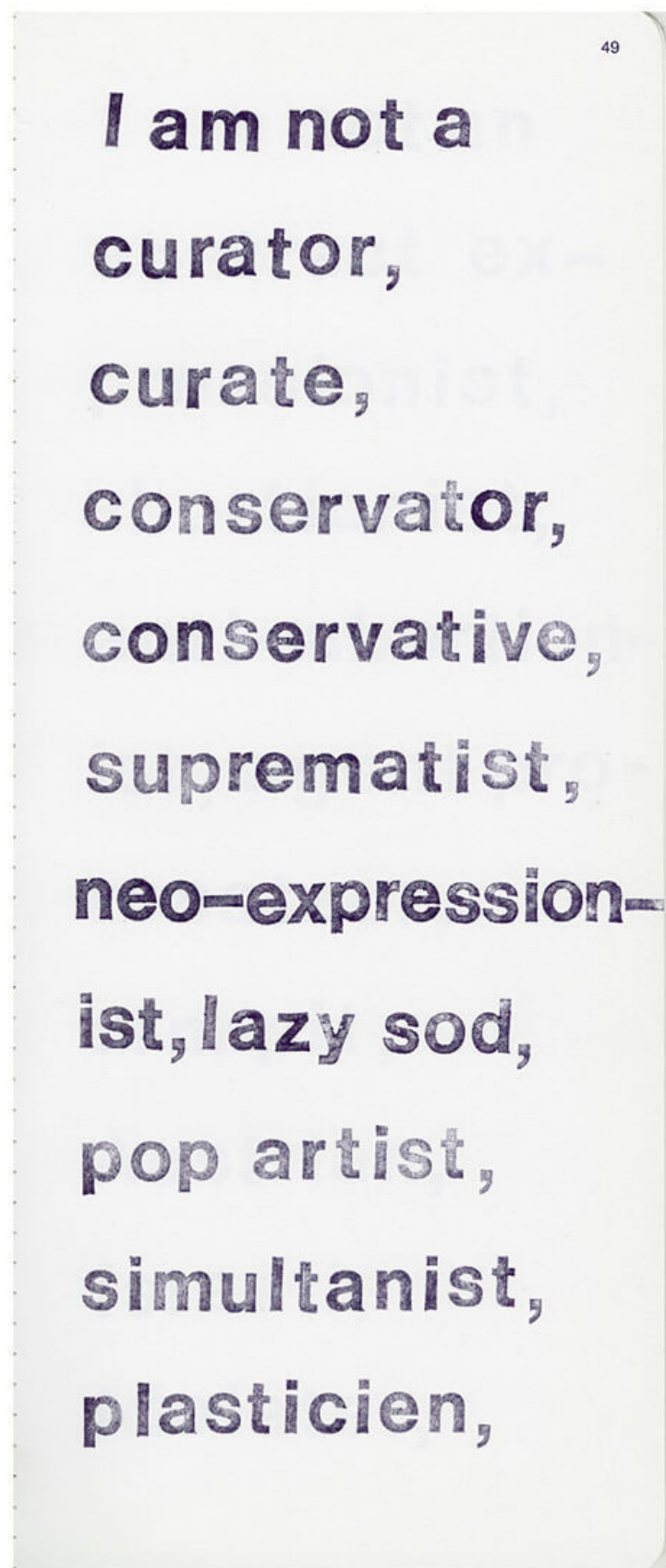
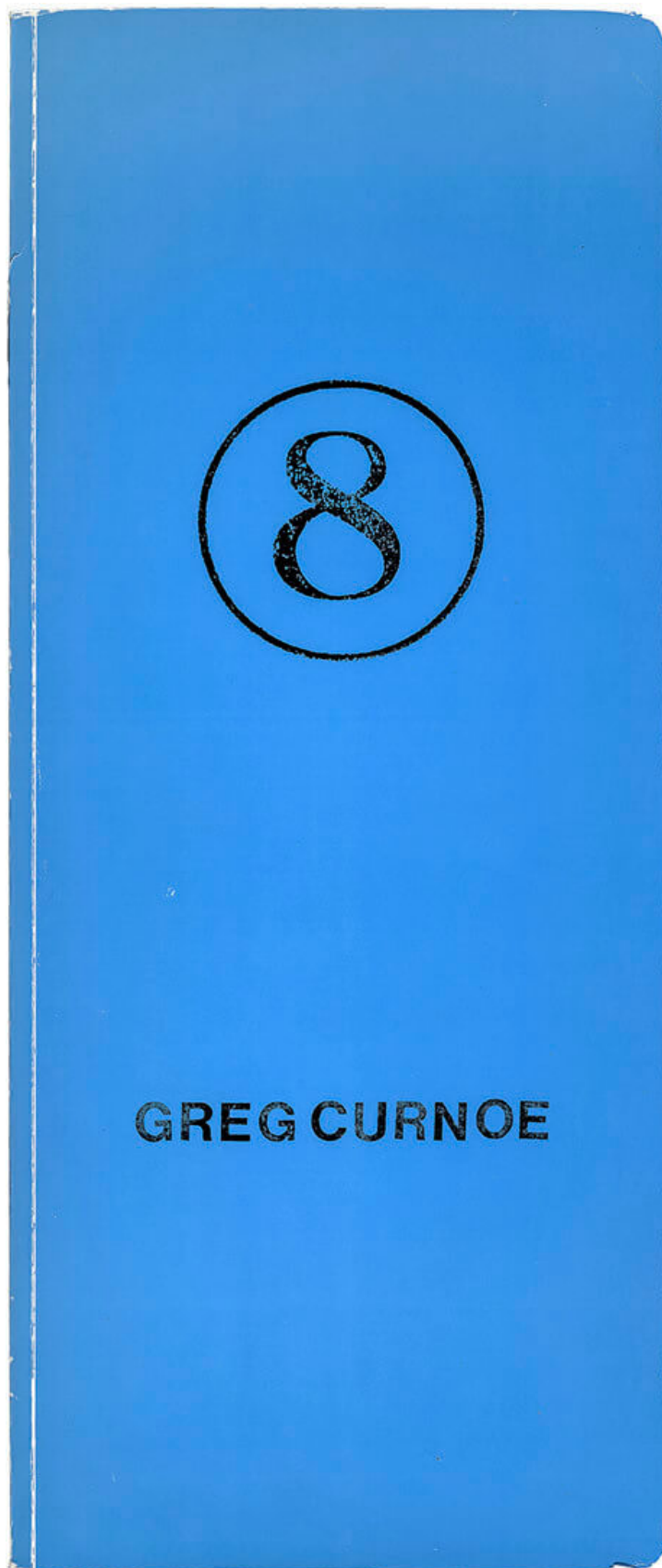


Interior pages of Greg Curnoe, *About Painters #1*, 1964-88, stamp pad ink and pencil on paper in cloth-bound "Record" book, 13 x 20 cm, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. One of Curnoe's early artist books. He used a self-devised scoring system to comment on other artists, including his friend Jack Chambers, and over the course of two decades periodically adjusted the number of stars given to each artist.

More than a decade later, Curnoe was awarded a Canada Council for the Arts grant to set up the journal *Provincial Essays*. Eight volumes devoted to recent Canadian visual culture were published from 1984 to 1989.

In addition to the periodicals, Greg Curnoe produced one-of-a-kind books, intended as works of art, again with roots in Dada and Conceptual art. Curnoe's 1962 book works—the seventy-one-page *Rain* and the seventy-eight-page *The Walk*—have been acknowledged as the first artist books in Canada.⁶ Curnoe made over a dozen such works, perhaps as a more intimate and portable form of working with words and images. Like his paintings, most of these were diaristic, recording his daily thoughts and observations. Perhaps the best known of Curnoe's books is *Blue Book #8*, which was published by Art Metropole in 1989. In it Curnoe defined himself negatively, noting 797 times what he was not, ending with "I AM NOT USUALLY PARANOID, GOD'S GIFT TO WOMEN, ILLITERATE, REFUNDABLE, UNDER WARRANTY, COOL, APPALLED, WISE, ALWAYS TRUTHFUL."⁷ This publication is the only one of Curnoe's artist books printed in a large edition, an inexpensive way of making his art accessible to a wider public.

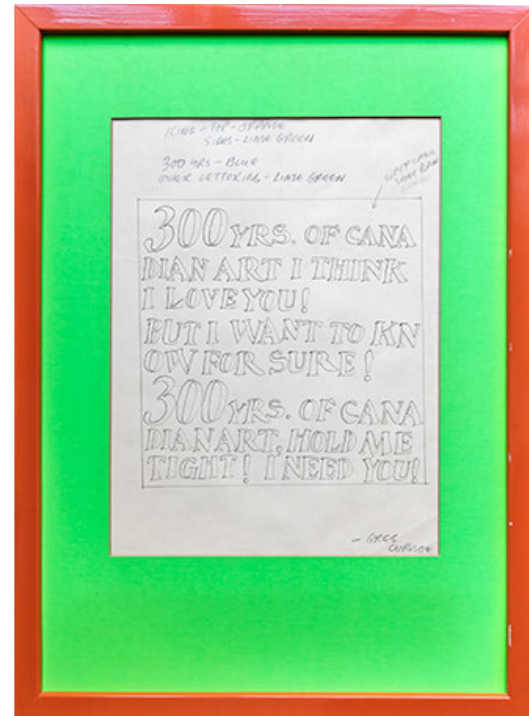
All of this activity led art historian Barry Lord to describe London, Ontario, as "the most important art centre in Canada and a model for artists working elsewhere" in a 1969 article in the influential magazine *Art in America*.⁸



LEFT: Cover of Greg Curnoe, *Blue Book #8*, stamp pad ink on paper, 16 x 36 cm, Toronto: Art Metropole, 1989. RIGHT: Interior of *Blue Book #8*, p. 49.

CULTURAL NATIONALISM, CONTROVERSY, AND CENSORSHIP

Greg Curnoe began his career at the beginning of a decade of change and turmoil in Canada and the world. Particularly relevant to his oeuvre were the sexual revolution, the Vietnam War, the increasing American influence on life in Canada, and Canadian nationalism. Curnoe was well versed in the debates about American imperialism and Canadian national identity waged in the media and in books by writers George Woodcock, Mel Watkins, George Grant, and Léandre Bergeron. Like other artists such as Joyce Wieland (1930–1998) and John Boyle (b. 1941), Curnoe exhibited his passion for Canada in his paintings, and in articles in journals and letters to the editors of newspapers. He believed that the sought-for Canadian identity resided in regional cultures across the country rather than in a single, unified sense of identity.



LEFT: Greg Curnoe's centennial cake. *From left:* Greg Curnoe (in custom mustard-yellow suit); Judy LaMarsh, secretary of state, cutting the 21-square-foot cake with a sword; Pierre Théberge, curator; and Jean Sutherland Boggs, director of the National Gallery of Canada, May 11, 1967, photographer unknown. RIGHT: Design for Curnoe's centennial cake with text based on "Wild Thing" by The Troggs, c. 1967, pencil on paper, collection of Stephen Smart.

His ambivalent Canadian nationalism is exemplified in his design for Canada's centennial cake, which was served at the opening of *300 Years of Canadian Art* at the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa in 1967. Curnoe's works often gave visual voice, usually with humour, to what was happening politically in Canada, whether in his portraits of political leaders or in works that posed ironic questions.



Greg Curnoe, *For Ben Bella*, 1964; oil on plywood construction, plastic, metal, and mixed media; 159.6 x 125.7 x 98.4 cm; Art Gallery of Alberta, Edmonton. This provocative and irreverent portrait of former Liberal prime minister William Lyon Mackenzie King was shown at Expo 67, in Montreal, and on the cover of the first issue of *artscanada* magazine.

For a time, much of this cultural nationalism was directed against the United States. In other words, the reverse side of his Canadian patriotism was “anti-Americanism.” He admitted to being anti-American, but it is important to understand that he was not against individual Americans or aspects of American culture, such as artists, poets, jazz, or comic books. Indeed, it was Curnoe who commissioned an exhibition by American artist Bruce Nauman (b. 1941) at London’s 20/20 Gallery in 1970. Rather, he was concerned with the “cultural imperialism” that he observed with the appointment of Americans in Canadian universities and cultural institutions, and with the corporate takeovers that were happening in London and across the country.

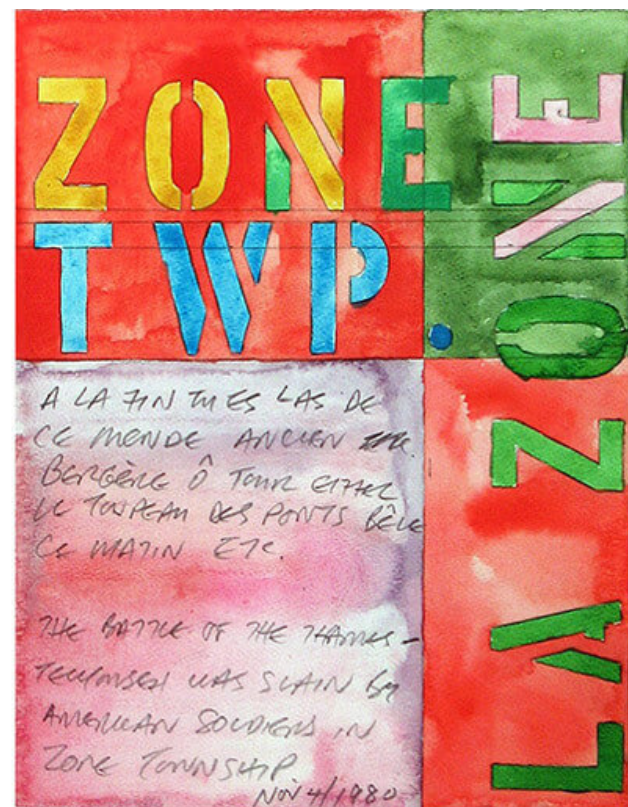
Further, on his first trip to New York in 1965, Curnoe had been shocked by the violent mugging of a friend and subsequently re-evaluated his feelings about the United States. Curnoe refused to exhibit his work there and, true to his principles, later turned down a lucrative opportunity to design a cover for *Time* magazine. Tellingly, he also excluded a reference to the *Time* review⁹ of the 1968 *Heart of London* exhibition in all of his files and bibliographic lists.



Greg Curnoe, *24 Hourly Notes*, December 14–15, 1966, stamp pad ink and acrylic on galvanized iron; 24 panels, each 25.4 x 25.4 cm; Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

Curnoe's patriotism overlaid with anti-Americanism led to controversy and censorship. The 1968 removal of his mural from the Montreal International Airport in Dorval, Quebec, because of anti-American statements is still one of the best-known examples of censorship in Canadian art history. Several months later, three panels of *24 Hourly Notes*, December 14–15, 1966, were removed from an exhibition in Edinburgh because of "indecent" words. When the same work was exhibited at the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa in 1970, a member of Parliament asked the prime minister, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, to have it removed. The work remained on exhibition. Both these issues engendered much national media coverage, including defensive responses from Curnoe.

Toward the end of his career, Curnoe began to realize the ultimate irony of the cultural imperialism of his own British ancestors. He had probably become more aware of First Nations history in Canada from his friend and mentor Selwyn Dewdney (1909–1979), an expert in indigenous pictographs. While Curnoe was interested in the history of Indigenous Peoples in Canada—there are references in his work to Métis leader Louis Riel and the Shawnee hero Tecumseh, who lost his life close to London in 1813 at the Battle of the Thames—it was not until he began researching the pre-colonial history of the property at 38 Weston Street that a new understanding of Canadian identity began to emerge. As literary and cultural critic Frank Davey noted, "[Curnoe] felt strongly that as a white individual he had benefitted directly from the injustices First Nations people had suffered and that a major part of that benefit was hidden in the Canadian 'forgetting' of thousands of years of First Nations social development and inhabiting of the land."¹⁰



LEFT: Greg Curnoe, *Tecumseh with Batoche Fragments*, 1981, watercolour and pencil on paper, 46 x 43 cm, private collection. Curnoe displayed the bust of Tecumseh, a personal hero, in his studio and visited Batoche, the site of Métis leader Louis Riel's defeat in 1885. Red and blue curtains printed with images of a 1970 Louis Riel postage stamp hung in Curnoe's studio. RIGHT: Greg Curnoe, *Tecumseh/Apollinaire*, November 4, 1980, watercolour and pencil on paper, 23 x 18 cm, private collection. Tecumseh was killed in Zone Township, Ontario. Curnoe has juxtaposed lines from the poem "Zone" by the French poet Guillaume Apollinaire.

INFLUENCE AND LEGACY

Greg Curnoe is still held in great esteem by a cross-section of the cultural community. In many ways, he was the heart of art in London. A natural and inclusive leader, he influenced his own generation of artists, and the ones to follow, by his decision to remain in London close to his roots, creating art based on his own environment and experience.

Younger artists were always welcome in his studio. Artist Wyn Geleynse (b. 1947) remembers being there as a high school art student: "Greg showed me that being an artist was a viable thing to do."¹¹ He further observed, "He [Curnoe] took the things we take for granted, external things, and gave them legitimacy. You can make work with global relevance by using the everyday. It is how you bring them together that matters."¹² Royden Rabinowitch (b. 1943), who had exhibited with Curnoe in the 1968 *Heart of London* exhibition, stressed the importance of the encouragement he had received from Curnoe: "I've always thought & still do that the one really immotional [sic] career influence that has affected me & still continues to affect me is my relationship with you. I was always & am continually strengthened by your acceptance of my lovely Barrel staves things & I always think with real feeling of your studio with the photo of my unfinished apple turnover stuck up on your door."¹³



Sheila and Greg Curnoe in the studio, 1988, photograph by Ian MacEachern. Note the large rubber stamps on the table in the foreground.

We will never know the full extent of the influence Curnoe's talks and teachings had on artists and students across Canada. Artists Jamelie Hassan (b. 1948) and Robert Fones (b. 1949) first encountered him in art classes at H.B. Beal Technical and Commercial High School and eventually became close friends. Hassan wrote: "Our experiences would also entail long

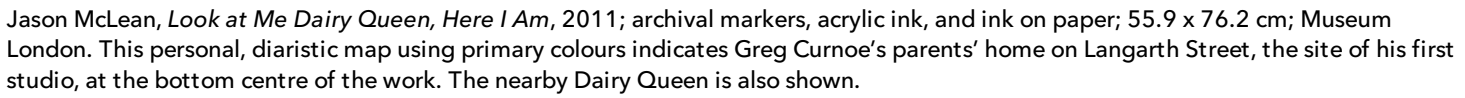
hours of debate and argument against ‘everything.’ Connecting people to each other and to ideas and to contemporary culture in Canada was central to maintaining a friendship with Greg Curnoe.”¹⁴ Among the many other artists who came within his orbit were Ron Benner (b. 1949), Andy Patton (b. 1952), Janice Gurney (b. 1949), and Greg Hill (b. 1967), who remembered: “From his example I took comfort in the notion of pride of place and self. His nationalism was surprising to me at the time, but also a little intoxicating.”¹⁵

More recently, artist Paul Butler (b. 1973) presented *The Greg Curnoe Bicycle Project* at the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto. Butler’s artistic practice combines art making with community building. Like Curnoe, he has an interest in collage, making lists, and building bikes. On July 23, 2011, Butler rode a replica of Curnoe’s first and favourite Mariposa bicycle through London with Curnoe’s friends and family, visiting important sites in Curnoe’s London. The replica was exhibited at the Art Gallery of Ontario along with items from the Greg Curnoe archives and Butler’s own “Curnoe-style” colour wheel, inscribed with the names of people who had helped with his research.¹⁶



Greg Curnoe at an exhibition of artists from London, Ontario, at Casa de las Américas in Havana, Cuba, 1988. *From left:* Ron Benner (artist), Hugo Jiménez (Casa de las Américas staff), Jamelie Hassan (artist), Greg Curnoe, Carmen Bedia (translator), Murray Favro (artist), Fern Helfand (artist, whose *Tourists at Niagara Falls*, 1988, is in background), Christopher Dewdney (who wrote the exhibition catalogue essay), His Excellency Mr. Michael Kergin (Canadian ambassador to Cuba).

Museum London’s 2013 exhibition *L.O. Today* featured artists Marc Bell (b. 1971), James Kirkpatrick (b. 1977), Amy Lockhart (b. 1979), Jason McLean (b. 1971), Jamie Q (b. 1980), Peter Thompson (b. 1970), and Billy Bert Young (b. 1983). Their works included text, cartoon-style drawings, found objects, constructions, artists’ books, maps, and ‘zines—all showing a debt to Curnoe. However, their collaborative approach, their choices of subject matter and colour, and their use of hand-drawn rather than stamped letters set them apart. For them, Curnoe’s regionalism is a foundation for creating their own idiosyncratic art.



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STYLE & TECHNIQUE

Greg Curnoe's artistic influences ranged from comic books to twentieth-century modernists. In the works of Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968), Francis Picabia (1879–1953), and Kurt Schwitters (1887–1948), he discovered anarchism, text, collage, found materials, and assemblage. He drew inspiration from the artists Henri Matisse (1869–1954), Robert Delaunay (1885–1941), and Cornelis “Kees” Van Dongen (1877–1968). Curnoe's use of highly keyed colour and text remained constants throughout his career as he made art out of the “stuff” of his daily experience.

DADA REMIXED

Greg Curnoe's earliest, most enduring artistic influence was probably comic books. As English professor Ross Woodman noted, "His childhood was shaped by comic magazines: Mickey Mouse, Goofy, the Shadow, Plastic Man, Captain Marvel were his favorites."¹ His natural drawing facility led him to create his own cartoons and comic books, such as *Dutch Dill Pickle*, c. 1948.



LEFT: Kurt Schwitters, *Mz 316 ische gelb* (*Mz 316 ische Yellow*), 1921, mixed media collage, 31.2 x 23.4 cm overall, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven. RIGHT: Greg Curnoe, *Cherry Pop #7*, November 18, 1964, stamp pad ink, collage on paper, 30.5 x 29.8 cm, Estate of Greg Curnoe. Curnoe originally framed this work in a diamond-shaped white frame, with the edges parallel to the "point" of the collage. Shown here is the work as it is today, reframed in the conventional rectangle.

Curnoe adopted the cartoon style of bright primary and secondary colours with no modelling of the shapes, as well as the combining of words and images and juxtaposing of complementary colours to increase their intensity.

In 1954 in the Special Art Program at H.B. Beal Technical and Commercial High School, Curnoe first learned about Marcel Duchamp and the Dadaists and read László Moholy-Nagy's book *Vision in Motion* (1947). He would have noted the famed Bauhaus professor's linking of image and text, as well as his belief in the interconnectedness of art and life. Another important resource, which he first read in 1957, was the famous *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology* (1951) by artist Robert Motherwell (1915-1991), with its images and texts by and about Duchamp, Kurt Schwitters, and Francis Picabia. He was attracted to the Dadaists' use of found objects, assemblage, text, and collage, as well as to the anarchism, the humour, the element of chance, the anti-war sentiments, and the emphasis on Conceptual art.

As early as 1961, following in the Dadaist tradition, especially of Schwitters, Greg Curnoe began to collage or glue ephemera from his life—bus transfers, labels, detritus picked up on the street, old cheques, comic strips, newspaper clippings—onto variously shaped pieces of paper. He then added rubber-stamped or stencilled texts.

In fact, Dada was a pervasive influence throughout Curnoe's career, from *Drawer Full of Stuff*, 1961, to his last full-sized bicycle portrait, *Funny Bicycle*, December 1985–May 20, 1986, an assemblage of a real bike frame with painted wooden wheels, a non-functioning bicycle.



Greg Curnoe, *Funny Bicycle*, December 1985–May 20, 1986, mixed media sculpture, 94 x 168.9 x 35.6 cm, private collection. Several important themes from Curnoe's career show up in this work, including bicycles, colour wheels, and assemblage.

Pop art had roots in Dada, so it is not surprising that Greg Curnoe's work has been included in Pop art exhibitions, most likely because of his inclusion in art critic Lucy Lippard's classic 1966 book *Pop Art*. She noted, "Greg Curnoe's main connection with Pop Art is his flat rendering of figures and the frequent but unobtrusive 'caption' across the top."²

Curnoe was in fact working with many of the elements of Pop art—bright colours, text, comic strip-style figures, and familiar “things”—before Pop art was generally known. Art critic Gary Michael Dault noted his quite different approach: “Pop artists paint universal, generalized, and frequently banal objects. Curnoe, by contrast, paints the local, personal, and absorbing objects and events that make up his life . . . That isn’t Pop. It’s Curnoe making his own interests public.”³



Greg Curnoe, *The Best Profile in the World*, 1963, oil and collage on plywood, 121.3 x 182.9 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Art historian Lucy Lippard selected this portrait of Curnoe’s friend William Exley, originally titled *The Greatest Profile in the World*, for her 1966 book, *Pop Art*. The title of the painting was later inexplicably changed, and consequently the humorous reference to actor John Barrymore—who was known as the Great Profile—was lost.

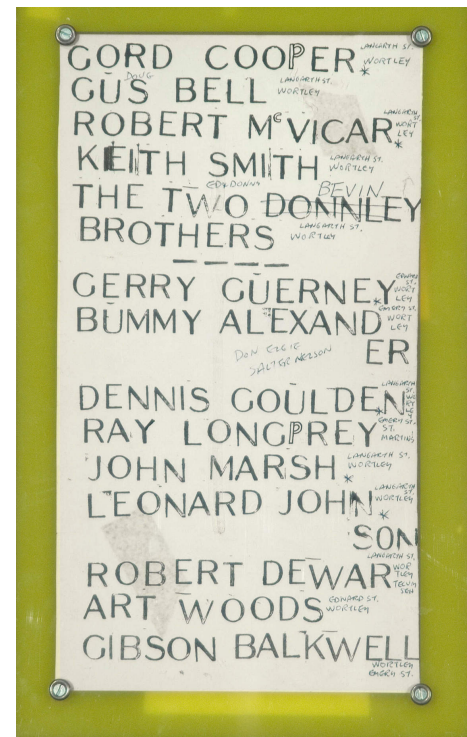
WORDS, WORDS, WORDS

Greg Curnoe's interest in text goes back to his childhood, when he was given a rubber stamp set as well as small rubber letters that were set in a wooden three-line holder. He produced occasional newsletters with his cousin Gary Bryant, who had a drum printing press. Curnoe also experimented with date stamps discarded from his father's office. He explained, "It was so natural for me to associate type and text with a picture. And I quickly learned there are things you can do with a text that you can't do with a picture."⁴ As a result, there are few works in Curnoe's oeuvre that do not include text of some kind. The discovery of the Dadaist use of text reinforced his childhood interest, but Curnoe used text in his own idiosyncratic way.

In 1961 Curnoe bought a new rubber stamp set, the first of many sets with uppercase letters that he used over the years. His early stamped works were lists: for example, lists of names of boys he grew up with. These were often very simple—black words stamped from individual letters combined with "found" texts. He also began the practice of making unique artists' books, creating over a dozen from 1962 to 1989.

In 1968 Curnoe stamped the monumental six canvases of *View of Victoria Hospital, First Series: #1-6*. As art critic John Noel Chandler noted, the significance of this text series cannot be overstated: "Perhaps what is most novel and striking about what Curnoe has done is that by portraying the physical landscape with words, which are more abstract than pictures of things (at least in a phonetic language like our own), while at the same time making his language as simple and concrete as possible, Curnoe has accomplished the very interesting paradox of making pictures which simultaneously are abstract and concrete, making one reconsider the value of the dualism."⁵

Text in Curnoe's work was stamped, stencilled, embossed, or handwritten, with the break in the lettering determined by the size of the support. Curnoe explained, "I discovered that a sans serif typeface isn't as legible as the more traditional serif faces. In other words, the letters stick out, they don't disappear. It makes you look and read at the same time."⁶



Greg Curnoe, *List of Names from Wortley Road School, 1962*, stamp pad ink and ball-point pen on paper, 33 x 18 cm, McIntosh Gallery, Western University, London. The two "P"s and the lower case "c" are hand drawn, rather than stamped, perhaps because these letters were missing from the stamp set.



LEFT: Installation view of Greg Curnoe, *View of Victoria Hospital, First Series: #1-6, 1968-69*, rubber stamp and ink over latex on canvas; six canvases, each 289.6 x 228.6 cm; National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, installation view unknown. Greg Curnoe stamped this non-figurative word description of his view of Victoria Hospital from one pane of his studio window. It was the first in a series of four works. RIGHT: Greg Curnoe creating *View of Victoria Hospital, First Series: #1-6, 1968*, photograph by Pierre Th  berge. Pictured is #1 in progress, September 1, 1968. Curnoe had to climb up and down ladders carrying individual stamps loaded with black ink, which he pressed forcefully onto white primed canvas that had been stapled to rubber carpet padding tacked to a sheet of plywood.

Curnoe was himself an omnivorous reader, and he amassed a large library over the years. Poetry anthologies and exhibition catalogues vied for space with atlases, novels, art books, and catalogues of bike parts. A novel that had a lasting influence on his work was *The Voyeur* (1955) by French writer and filmmaker Alain Robbe-Grillet, whose emphasis on precise language with an absence of metaphor was the literary equivalent of the visual style Curnoe was developing in the early sixties. Curnoe noted: "It is still one of my favourite novels and served to confirm my interest in using simple language and simple direct description."⁷



Curnoe's studio in 1988, photograph by Ian MacEachern.

The two views of Victoria Hospital are excellent examples of Robbe-Grillet's influence, with their straightforward description—one in words and one in imagery with accompanying text—of the hospital directly across the river from his studio.

RAZZLE-DAZZLE COLOUR



LEFT: Greg Curnoe, Self-Portrait, 1956, oil on cardboard, 30.5 x 20.5 cm, private collection. Curnoe's work before 1960 tended to be monochromatic. RIGHT: Greg Curnoe, Girl, c. 1960, Day-Glo paint and acrylic on paperboard, 112 x 71.1 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. The AGO catalogues this work as Untitled (Full-Length Walking Woman) though Curnoe titles it Girl in his personal slides.

This virtuosity is astonishing considering that Curnoe was slightly red/green colour blind.⁸ He would not have seen the world in grey, as is sometimes assumed, but he might have had difficulty distinguishing one colour placed on top of another. As a result, he may have used the technique of placing bright colours in adjacent but rarely overlapping areas as a conscious strategy to see them clearly. When one thinks of Greg Curnoe, it is colour-saturated, intense, and insistent—that often first comes to mind, no matter the medium. Curnoe became a master of the application of pigments, usually very bright, be it fluorescent or other industrial paint, oil, acrylic, watercolour, or pastel.

His paintings before 1960—for example, the 1956 *Self-Portrait*—tend to be monochromatic and duller than his subsequent work, such as *Girl*, c. 1960. Stamping black ink on collaged ephemera or on a monochrome background, as in *The True North Strong and Free*, #1-5, 1968, or *Deeds #5*, August 19-22, 1991, might have been another form of accommodation. His admiration for the work of Montreal painters Guido Molinari (1933-2004) and Claude Tousignant (b. 1932) could be partly due to their use of bright, non-overlapping colours.

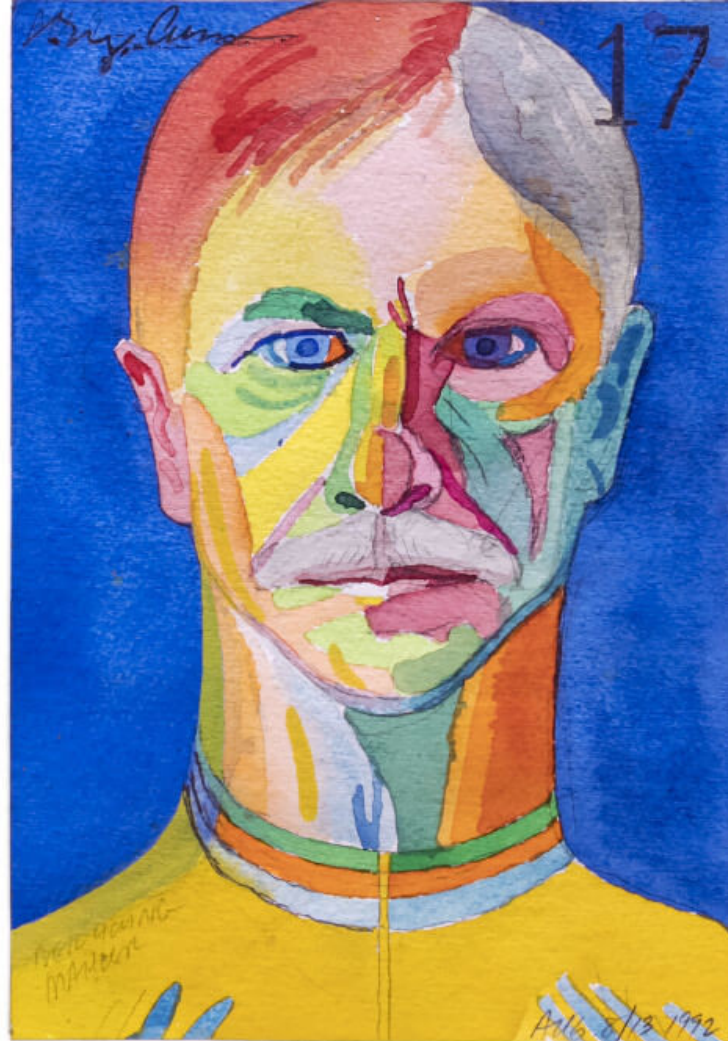
Over the years, Curnoe became knowledgeable about pigments. He researched their origins, captivated by the romance of names such as Bremen blue and Vienna lake. He also understood colour theory, using complementary colours to great effect, particularly his favourite blue and orange combination. Artist Robert Fones (b. 1949) observed: “For Curnoe . . . pigments provided a ready-made alphabet with universal and local associations.”⁹

Greg Curnoe’s mastery of the watercolour medium is undisputed. He most likely learned the technique at art school and continued to paint small watercolour landscapes throughout his career. He applied the bright transparent colour to dry paper, a good choice for on-the-spot sketches while travelling.



LEFT: Greg Curnoe, *Sunset, Port Franks*, 1988, watercolour and pencil on paper, 22.9 x 30.5 cm, collection of Ian Ross. RIGHT: Greg Curnoe, *Above Glen Huron, Looking North, August 10-13*, 1987, watercolour on paper, 30.8 x 41 cm, McIntosh Gallery, Western University, London.

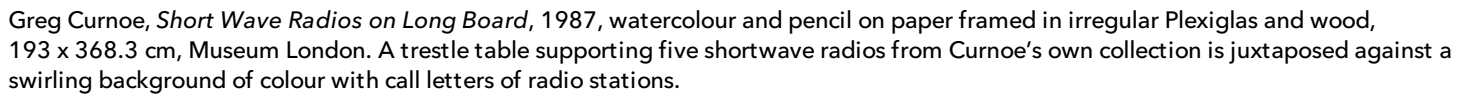
Sometimes Curnoe’s use of colour was straightforward, but at other times he made unusual choices, such as in a series of twenty self-portraits created in the summer of 1992. In the image of a work in progress, *Self-Portrait #17*, we can see that Curnoe began by sketching the broad outlines of his head and face in pencil and dating the work. Next he brushed on the blue watercolour background and stamped the number 17 at the top right before filling the drawn areas with arbitrary colour, including his favourite orange, yellow, and blue.



LEFT: Greg Curnoe, *Self-Portrait #17* in progress, photograph by Greg Curnoe. Here Curnoe has begun by sketching the broad outlines of his head and face in pencil and dating the work. He has brushed on the watercolour background and stamped the top right-hand corner of the work. RIGHT: Greg Curnoe, *Self-Portrait #17*, August 8, 1992; watercolour, pencil, ink, stamp pad ink; 26 x 18 cm; private collection. Here he is wearing the official London Centennial Wheelers cycling shirt he had designed. Note the dot of orange in the corner of his right eye to intensify the blue.

For large works, Curnoe had originally used paint on a wooden support, but in 1973 he switched to watercolour for the first of ten large-scale bicycle portraits. These were risky undertakings, as watercolour cannot be painted over in the event of a mistake and large paper is expensive. He produced several other large watercolours, including *Homage to Van Dongen #1 (Sheila)*, June 27, 1978–November 23, 1979, but his largest watercolour is the magnificent *Short Wave Radios on Long Board*, 1987. This inspired commission by Blackburn Radio Inc., a London family-run business with radio stations all over “Souwesto,” drew on Curnoe’s long-standing interest in radio and is a superb example of Curnoe’s sensuous swirling colour.

Constantly innovating and experimenting, Greg Curnoe chose whatever style, medium, or technique would best express his ideas. His oeuvre, defined by his life experience and rendered with superb technical virtuosity, remains a testament to a life lived creatively, a life in which art was life and life was art.





WHERE TO SEE

Greg Curnoe's works can be found in numerous public and private collections across Canada. The most significant collections are at Museum London, the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, and Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. The E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives at the AGO is an excellent resource that contains the Greg Curnoe fonds and copies of his major publications. The McIntosh Gallery at Western University holds the photographic archive of Don Vincent, who documented the artistic scene of London in the 1960s and 1970s, and includes numerous photographs of Curnoe and his friends. For works produced in multiple editions, below is a selection of institutions that have at least one multiple in their collections.

Although the following institutions hold the works listed below, they may not always be on view.

ART GALLERY OF ALBERTA

2 Sir Winston Churchill Square
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada
780-422-6223
youraga.ca



Greg Curnoe, *For Ben Bella*, 1964

Oil on plywood construction,
plastic, metal, and mixed media
159.6 x 125.7 x 98.4 cm

ART GALLERY OF ONTARIO

317 Dundas Street West
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
1-877-255-4246 or 416-979-6648
ago.net



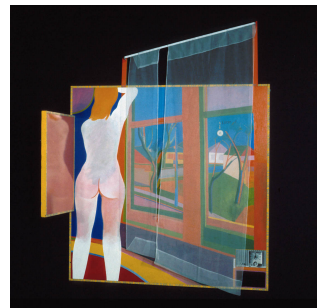
Greg Curnoe, *Girl*, c. 1960

(Catalogued as *Untitled* [*Full-Length Walking Woman*])
Day-Glo paint and
acrylic on paperboard
112 x 71.1 cm



Greg Curnoe, *Drawer Full of Stuff*, 1961

Assemblage (found
objects in drawer) on
wood (painted wood
drawer)
16 x 30.4 x 36.5 cm



Greg Curnoe, *Spring on the Ridgeway*, 1964

Oil on plywood and
Masonite, rayon/nylon,
metal, wood, paper,
and string
187 x 187 cm



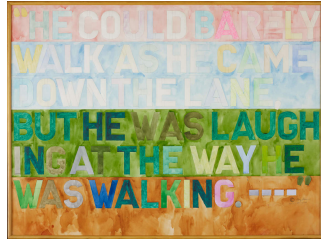
Greg Curnoe, *About Painters #1*, 1964-88

Stamp pad ink and
pencil on paper in
cloth-bound "Record"
book
13 x 20 cm



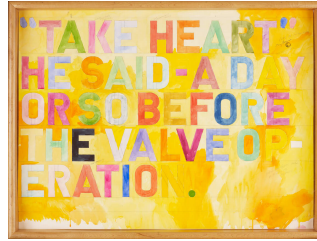
Greg Curnoe, *24 Hourly Notes*, December 14-15, 1966

Stamp pad ink and acrylic on galvanized iron
24 panels, each 25.4 x 25.4 cm



Greg Curnoe, *For Jack #2*, July 22-September 20, 1978

Watercolour and pencil on wove paper
102.6 x 138.4 cm



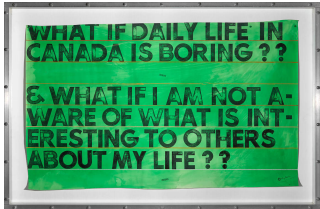
Greg Curnoe, *For Selwyn #2*, November 20-26, 1979

Watercolour and pencil on wove paper
84.5 x 114 cm



Greg Curnoe, *Middle-Aged Man in LCW Riding Suit*, 1983

Watercolour and pencil on paper
196 x 177 cm



Greg Curnoe, *Doubtful Insight*, March 23, 1987

(Catalogued as *What If Daily Life in Canada Is Boring?*)

Gouache, watercolour, stamp pad ink, pastel on wove paper
117.8 x 190.5 cm



Greg Curnoe, *Blue Book #8*, 1989

Stamp pad ink on paper
16 x 36 cm



JUSTINA M. BARNICKE GALLERY AT HART HOUSE

Art Museum at the University of Toronto
7 Hart House Circle
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
416-978-8398
jmbgallery.ca



Greg Curnoe, *Homage to Van Dongen #1 (Sheila)*, June 27, 1978–November 23, 1979

Watercolour and graphite on paper
152.4 x 243.8 cm

MACKENZIE ART GALLERY

University of Regina
3475 Albert Street
Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada
306-584-4250
mackenzieartgallery.ca

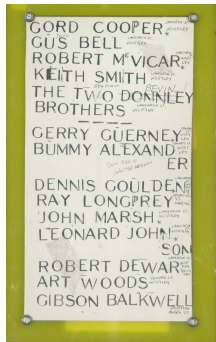


Greg Curnoe, *Tall Girl When I Am Sad on Dundas Street*, 1961

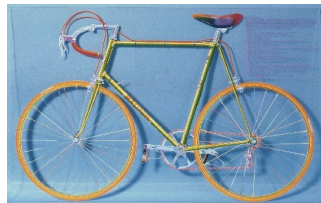
Oil on Masonite
182.9 x 121.9 cm

MCINTOSH GALLERY

Western University
London, Ontario, Canada
519-661-3181
mcintoshgallery.ca



Greg Curnoe, *List of Names from Wortley Road School*, 1962
Stamp pad ink and ball-point pen on paper
33 x 18 cm



Greg Curnoe, *Mariposa T.T.*, 1979
Colour serigraph on Plexiglas
108 x 169.9 cm



Greg Curnoe, *Above Glen Huron, Looking North*, August 10-13, 1987
Watercolour on paper
30.8 x 41 cm

MUSÉE D'ART CONTEMPORAIN DE MONTRÉAL

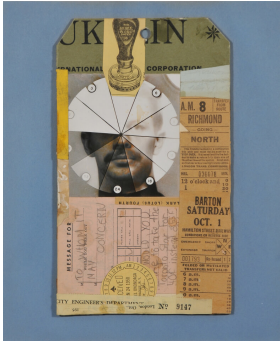
185 rue Sainte-Catherine Ouest
Montreal, Quebec, Canada
514-847-6226
macm.org



Greg Curnoe, *Sanouillet #2*, 1980
Watercolour on paper
153.7 x 77.5 cm

MUSEUM LONDON

421 Ridout Street North
London, Ontario, Canada
519-661-0333
museumlondon.ca



Greg Curnoe, *Self-Portrait from "Art Store Fixture,"* 1961
Ink and collage
30 x 25 cm



Greg Curnoe, *Four Piece Set,* 1965-67
Collage, stamp pad ink on card, Plexiglas, screws, cup washers, screw eyes on painted wood
Nose A: 51 x 41.4 cm (May 25, 1966)
Moustache #7: 21.2 x 45 cm (December 5, 1965)
Lip and Chin #1: 17.5 x 20.6 cm (July 3, 1967)
Tie #5: 54.5 x 24.1 cm (July 3, 1967)



Greg Curnoe, *The True North Strong and Free, #1-5,* 1968
Stamp pad ink and polyurethane on paper on plywood
Five panels, each (max.) 60 x 63.5 cm



Greg Curnoe, *Owen, June 21, 1983 - February 15, 1984*
Watercolour and pencil on paper
183 x 108.5 cm



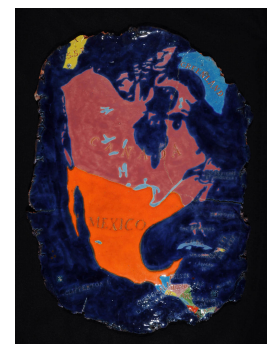
Greg Curnoe, *Galen,* February 12-November 26, 1984
Watercolour and pencil on paper
201 x 110 cm



Greg Curnoe, *Zoë,* December 6, 1984-May 12, 1986
Pastel and pencil on paper
194 x 90 cm



Greg Curnoe, *Short Wave Radios on Long Board,* 1987
Watercolour and pencil on paper framed in irregular Plexiglas and wood
193 x 368.3 cm



Greg Curnoe, *Untitled,* 1990
Fired clay with glaze
68 x 50 x 2 cm



NATIONAL GALLERY OF CANADA

380 Sussex Drive
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
613-990-1985
gallery.ca



Greg Curnoe, *The Best Profile in the World*, 1963

Oil and collage on plywood
121.3 x 182.9 cm



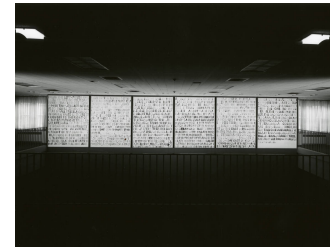
Greg Curnoe, *The Camouflaged Piano or French Roundels*, 1965-66

Oil on plywood with hotel sign with incandescent lights
259.7 x 372.1 x 29 cm



Greg Curnoe, *Homage to the R 34 [the Dorval mural]*, October 1967-March 1968

Bostik urethane enamel paint on plywood and steel, propellers, metal screens, and electric motors
26 panels of irregular dimensions installed in three units:
295 x 1551 x 25.5 cm;
195 x 1109.9 x 25.5 cm;
191.5 x 492.7 x 2.5 cm
(overall length 32.2 m)



Greg Curnoe, *View of Victoria Hospital, First Series: #1-6*, 1968-69

Stamp pad ink over latex on canvas
Six canvases, each
289.6 x 228.6 cm



Greg Curnoe, *View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series*, February 10, 1969-March 10, 1971

Oil, rubber stamp and ink, graphite, and wallpaper on plywood, in Plexiglas strip frame, with audiotape, tape player, loudspeakers, and eight-page text (photocopied from a rubber-stamped notebook)
243.8 x 487 cm
assembled



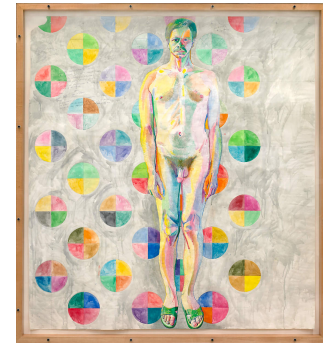
Greg Curnoe, *Mariposa 10 Speed No. 2*, March 25, 1973-April 25, 1973

Watercolour over graphite on wove paper
101.1 x 181.4 cm



Greg Curnoe, *Large Colour Wheel*, 1980

Watercolour and graphite on wove paper
189 x 189 cm



Greg Curnoe, *What's Good for the Goose Is Good for the Gander*, 1983

Watercolour, pencil, and ballpoint pen on wove paper
193.3 x 175 cm



Greg Curnoe, *America*, July 1989

Trial proof II state 2, colour lithograph on wove paper, printed by Don Holman
73.9 x 57.6 cm



VANCOUVER ART GALLERY

750 Hornby Street
Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada
604-662-4719
vanartgallery.bc.ca



Greg Curnoe, *Myself Walking North in the Tweed Coat*, 1963

Oil on plywood
183.2 x 122.2 cm

WINNIPEG ART GALLERY

300 Memorial Boulevard
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada
204-786-6641
wag.ca



Greg Curnoe, *Deeds #5, August 19-22, 1991*

Stamp pad ink, poster paint,
pencil, watercolour on paper
110 x 168 cm



NOTES

BIOGRAPHY

1. Judith Fitzgerald, "Curnoe Memory Paintings: Hospitals, Bicycles, Politics," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), July 30, 1983.
2. John Boyle, "Reflections on Greg Curnoe: He Is Us," *Carnet* 1, no. 2 (Spring 1993): 20-26.
3. Greg Hill, "I Am Greg (Hill That Is)," *Open Letter*, 11th Series, no. 5 (Summer 2002): 49.
4. Ross Woodman, "A New Regionalism," *artscanada*, August/September 1967, separate supplement.
5. Sara Milroy, "Greg Curnoe: Time Machines," *Greg Curnoe: Life & Stuff* (Toronto and Vancouver: Art Gallery of Ontario and Douglas & McIntyre, 2001), 42.
6. Madeline Lennon, *Research Development: Greg Curnoe, Jake Moore & Canadian Culture* (London, ON: London Regional Art & Historical Museums, 1992 [pamphlet]).
7. Greg Curnoe consistently used uppercase letters, the ampersand, and the number sign in his writings and in titling his works. Title treatments in this book favour Curnoe's preferences.
8. Pierre Th  berge, "London Recaptured," *Canadian Literature* 152/153 (Spring/Summer 1997): 160-66.
9. Dennis Reid, "Some Things I Learned from Greg Curnoe," *Greg Curnoe: Life & Stuff* (Toronto and Vancouver: Art Gallery of Ontario and Douglas & McIntyre, 2001), 111.
10. John Bentley Mays, "The Art World's Bigfoot Battles Big-City Bias," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), March 18, 1982.
11. In this title Greg Curnoe reversed the letters in the word "you," probably in reference to the mirror he used to create his self-portraits.

KEY WORKS: DRAWER FULL OF STUFF

1. Michel Sanouillet, "The Sign of Dada," *Canadian Art* 19, no. 2, issue 78 (March/April 1962): 111.

KEY WORKS: MYSELF WALKING NORTH IN THE TWEED COAT

1. Greg Curnoe's mother would later use the tweed coat pictured here to make a hooked rug for her son Glen.

KEY WORKS: FOUR PIECE SET

1. Robert Fones, *CUTOUT: Greg Curnoe Shaped Collages, 1965-1968* (London, ON: Museum London, 2011): 57.



KEY WORKS: THE CAMOUFLAGED PIANO OR FRENCH ROUNDELS

1. Pierre Théberge, *Greg Curnoe: Rétrospective/Retrospective* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1981): 90.

KEY WORKS: THE TRUE NORTH STRONG AND FREE, #1–5

1. John Noel Chandler, "Sources Are Resources: Greg Curnoe's Objects, Objectives and Objections," *artscanada* 30, no. 1, issue 176/177 (February/March 1973): 69.

KEY WORKS: VIEW OF VICTORIA HOSPITAL, SECOND SERIES

1. "Painter Greg Curnoe Champions Canadian Artists," a short CBC documentary from 1975, features a scene of Greg Curnoe [discussing his view of the hospital]. See <http://www.cbc.ca/archives/entry/painter-greg-curnoe-forms-artists-union>.

KEY WORKS: MAP OF NORTH AMERICA

1. Greg Curnoe quoted in Barrie Hale, "Stick Around and Work with What's Around You: An Article about What Greg Curnoe Is About," *Saturday Night* 85, no. 1 (January 1970): 28.
2. Greg Curnoe, "Amendments to the Continental Refusal/Refus Continental," *Beyond Wilderness: The Group of Seven, Canadian Identity and Contemporary Art*, ed. John O'Brien and Peter White (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 57.
3. Sheila Curnoe, in conversation with the author, November 10, 2011.

KEY WORKS: MARIPOSA 10 SPEED NO. 2

1. In his personal slide inventory, Curnoe uses the abbreviation "No." in the title of *Mariposa 10 Speed No. 2*, rather than his usually favoured number sign (#).

KEY WORKS: HOMAGE TO VAN DONGEN #1 (SHEILA)

1. For a detailed analysis of the approach to colour in this work, see the letter from Robert Fones to Greg Curnoe on March 7, 1988, in Greg Curnoe Fonds, Series 2: Correspondence Files, 1988, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.
2. Greg Curnoe, handwritten note dated November, 22, 1979, Writing 1979 file, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

KEY WORKS: LARGE COLOUR WHEEL

1. The artists and their works are Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, work not identified; Robert Delaunay, *Simultaneous Disc*, 1912; Mikhail Matiouchine, *Mouvement dans l'espace*, 1917; Oscar Cahén, possibly *Animated Item*, 1955; and Claude Tousignant, *Gong 88*, 1967.
2. Michel Sanouillet, "From Duchamp to Curnoe," in "We Are Not Greg Curnoe," *Open Letter: A Canadian Journal of Writing and Theory*, 11th Series, no. 5 (Summer 2002): 37.



KEY WORKS: DEEDS #5

1. Greg Curnoe, *Deeds/Abstracts: The History of a London Lot*, ed. Frank Davey (London, ON: Brick Books, 1995), 22.
2. Neal Ferris, "Preface," in Greg Curnoe, *Deeds/Nations*, ed. Frank Davey and Neal Ferris (London, ON: Occasional Publications of the London Chapter, Ontario Archaeological Society, no. 4, 1996), xiii.
3. Greg Curnoe, *Deeds/Abstracts: The History of a London Lot*, ed. Frank Davey (London, ON: Brick Books, 1995), 28.

SIGNIFICANCE & CRITICAL ISSUES

1. Greg Curnoe, "Region=Regionalism," *Gazette* (Western University, London, ON), March 15, 1963, 9.
2. Greg Curnoe, "Region," paper presented to the Regionalism Conference, London, ON, October 1, 1983, Writings File 1983, Greg Curnoe Fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.
3. Greg Curnoe, "Five Co-op Galleries in Toronto and London from 1957 to 1992," June/July 1992, Writings File 1992, Greg Curnoe Fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.
4. John Boyle, "Reflections on Greg Curnoe: He Is Us," *Carnet* 1 (Spring 1993): 20-26.
5. Robert Fulford, "A Self-Portrait by Alex Colville," *National Post* (Toronto), October 31, 2000. <http://www.robertfulford.com/AlexColville.html>.
6. Nancy Tousley and Felipe Ehrenberg, *Learn to Read Art: Artists' Books* (Hamilton, ON: Art Gallery of Hamilton, 1990).
7. Greg Curnoe, *Blue Book* #8, Dec. 7, 1988-October 2, 1989 (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1989), 167.
8. Barry Lord, "What London, Ontario Has That Everywhere Else Needs," *Art in America* 57 (September-October 1969): 103-5.
9. Geoffrey James, "The Arts: Bright Lights of London," *Time* (Canadian edition), September 27, 1968, 20.
10. Frank Davey, "Editor's Note," in *Deeds/Abstracts: The History of a London Lot* (London, ON: Brick Books, 1995), 16.
11. Wyn Geleynse in conversation with Judith Rodger, September 20, 2015.
12. Wyn Geleynse quoted in Madeline Lennon, "Wyn Geleynse-Reflections," in *(Re)imagining Regionalism*, ed. Joel Faflak and Sky Glabush (London, ON: McIntosh Gallery Curatorial Study Centre, 2013), 99.



13. Royden Rabinowitch, letter to Greg Curnoe, undated but mailed May 19, 1976, Correspondence File, 1976, Greg Curnoe Fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.
14. Jamelie Hassan, "The Importance of Discussing Everything," in "We Are Not Greg Curnoe," *Open Letter*, 11th Series, no. 5 (Summer 2002): 29.
15. Greg Hill, "I Am Greg (Hill That Is)," in "We Are Not Greg Curnoe," *Open Letter*, 11th Series, no. 5 (Summer 2002): 49.
16. See Paul Butler, "The Greg Curnoe Bike Project," *Border Crossings* 120 (December 2011). A documentary film of the ride can be found at <https://vimeo.com/28636995>.

STYLE & TECHNIQUE

1. Ross Woodman, "Greg Curnoe," essay for *Greg Curnoe's Series* exhibition, London, ON: 20/20 Gallery, February 1967 [mimeographed].
2. Lucy R. Lippard, *Pop Art* (New York: Praeger, 1966), 198.
3. Gary Michael Dault, "Greg Curnoe's Love of Bicycles Expressed in Beautiful Paintings," *Toronto Star*, February 7, 1975.
4. Greg Curnoe, edited transcript of an interview with *Artviews* [Fred Gaysek] about *I Tell Stories* exhibition, December 3, 1987, Greg Curnoe Fonds, Writings File 1987, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.
5. John Chandler, "More Words on Curnoe's Wordly World," *artscanada* 26, no. 2 (April 1969): 4.
6. Greg Curnoe, edited transcript of an interview with *Artviews* [Fred Gaysek] about *I Tell Stories* exhibition, December 3, 1987, Greg Curnoe Fonds, Writings File 1987, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.
7. Greg Curnoe, "Some Lettered Works, 1961-1969," typewritten text, Greg Curnoe Fonds, Box 3, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.
8. Although Pierre Théberge considered this a malicious rumour, Sheila Curnoe has confirmed that her husband was red/green colour blind but that he never had a formal diagnosis.
9. Robert Fones, "Local Colour: Colour and Technique in the Work of Joanne Tod, Greg Curnoe and Jaan Poldas," *C Magazine* 38 (Summer 1993): 39.



GLOSSARY

American Regionalism

An art movement popular from the 1920s to 1950s. Based in the American heartland, its adherents created pastoral scenes that venerated a pre-industrial United States, inspired by their rural and small-town surroundings. Among the most celebrated American Regionalists are the painters John Steuart Curry, Grant Wood, and Thomas Hart Benton.

artist-run gallery/centre

A gallery or other art space developed and run by artists. In Canada these include YYY and Art Metropole in Toronto, Forest City Gallery in London, Western Front in Vancouver, and formerly Véhicule Art Inc., Montreal, The Region Gallery, London, and Garret Gallery, Toronto. Not-for-profit organizations, these centres exist outside the commercial and institutional gallery system. They aim to support the production and exhibition of new artworks, dialogue between artists, and avant-garde practices and emerging artists.

artscanada

The national visual-arts periodical *Canadian Art* has gone through several name changes since it was founded in 1940. First called *Maritime Art*, it became *Canadian Art* in 1943; in 1967, its editor changed its name to *artscanada*. It became *Canadian Art* again in 1983.

assemblage

An assemblage, collage, or bricolage is a three-dimensional artwork created from found objects. The term "assemblage" was first used in the 1950s by the French artist Jean Dubuffet to describe his butterfly-wing collages; it was popularized in the United States in reference to the work of the American artists Robert Rauschenberg and Jim Dine.

Bauhaus

Open from 1919 to 1933 in Germany, the Bauhaus revolutionized twentieth-century visual arts education by integrating the fine arts, crafts, industrial design, and architecture. Teachers included Josef Albers, Walter Gropius, Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and László Moholy-Nagy.

Benner, Ron (Canadian, b. 1949)

An artist, writer, and activist from London, Ontario. Benner studied agricultural engineering at the University of Guelph, and food production and consumption are the consistent subjects of his artworks. His widely exhibited photographic, mixed media, and garden installations have been exhibited internationally and are held by major Canadian institutions, including the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, and the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

Bloore, Ronald (Canadian, 1925–2009)

A founding member of the abstract painting group The Regina Five, Ronald Bloore was an abstract painter and art teacher. Seeking to achieve a transcendental quality to his art that he saw captured in the ancient



architecture of Greece, Turkey, and Egypt, in the early 1960s Bloore destroyed his earlier work and began explorations in black and white, employing bold, organic shapes. Architecture continued to inform his work and he began to link with the practice technically, making small, three-dimensional maquettes of his pieces before creating them in their full size.

Boyle, John (Canadian, b. 1941)

A largely self-taught painter who grew up in London, Ontario, Boyle is a founding member of the Nihilist Spasm Band and exhibited with the London Regionalists. An ardent Canadian, he is particularly noted for his contributions to sociopolitical art in Canada. Over the years, Boyle has been an important agitator for artists' rights: he is a cofounder of the Niagara Artists Centre and the first spokesperson of Canadian Artists' Representation Ontario (CARO).

Butler, Paul (Canadian, b. 1973)

Born and based in Winnipeg, Butler is a multidisciplinary artist, whose artistic practice embraces and explores artistic exchange and collaboration. His work has been exhibited nationally and internationally at venues including the Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles and La maison rouge in Paris.

Canada Council for the Arts

A Crown corporation created in 1957 by the parliamentary Canada Council for the Arts Act. The Canada Council exists to encourage art production and promote the study and enjoyment of art in Canada. It provides support to artists and arts organizations from across all artistic disciplines, including visual art, dance, music, and literature.

CARFAC (Canadian Artists' Representation)

A national non-profit artists' organization that serves to protect the economic and intellectual property rights of its members and to promote the visual arts in Canada. CARFAC was founded in 1968 by London artists Jack Chambers, Tony Urquhart, and Kim Ondaatje; it currently has around four thousand members.

Chambers, Jack (Canadian, 1931–1978)

A London, Ontario, painter and avant-garde filmmaker, whose meditative paintings typically depict domestic subjects, Chambers was committed to regionalism, despite the international outlook he developed during five years of artistic training in Madrid. He was one of the founders of CARFAC, Canada's artists' rights protection agency. (See *Jack Chambers: Life & Work* by Mark Cheetham.)

colour theory

A collection of ideas and concepts—scientific, philosophical, and psychological—related to human perception of colour. For centuries, painters have looked to colour theory for practical guidance on how to create specific effects in their works, and several modern art movements, including Pointillism, Orphism, and Synchronism, are rooted in specific theories of colour.



Colville, Alex (Canadian, 1920–2013)

A painter, muralist, draftsman, and engraver whose highly representational images verge on the surreal. Colville's paintings typically depict everyday scenes of rural Canadian life imbued with an uneasy quality. Since his process was meticulous—the paint applied dot by dot—he produced only three or four paintings or serigraphs per year. (See *Alex Colville: Life & Work* by Ray Cronin.)

Conceptual art

Traced to the work of Marcel Duchamp but not codified until the 1960s, Conceptual art is a general term for art that emphasizes ideas over form. The finished product may even be physically transient, as with land art or performance art.

Cubism

A radical style of painting developed by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque in Paris between 1907 and 1914, defined by the representation of numerous perspectives at once. Cubism is considered crucial to the history of modern art for its enormous international impact; famous practitioners also include Juan Gris and Francis Picabia.

Dada

A multi-disciplinary movement that arose in Europe in response to the horrors of the First World War, whose adherents aimed to deconstruct and demolish traditional societal values and institutions. Artworks, often collages and readymades, typically scorned fine materials and craftsmanship. Chief Dadaists include Marcel Duchamp, Tristan Tzara, Kurt Schwitters, and Hans Arp.

Delaunay, Robert (French, 1885–1941)

The first truly abstract painter in France. Delaunay's interest in colour theory—including how colours interact and relate to music and movement—is manifest in almost all of his work. Dubbed Orphism by Guillaume Apollinaire, his style influenced numerous artists and artistic movements, including German Expressionism, Futurism, and Synchronism.

Dewdney, Selwyn (Canadian, 1909–1979)

An artist, teacher, and writer based in London, Ontario, active in the development of the local arts scene at mid-century. One of the first Canadians to produce abstract paintings, he was also a scholar of Indigenous art and the co-developer of the country's first psychiatric art therapy program.

Duchamp, Marcel (French/American, 1887–1968)

One of the most significant artist-thinkers of the twentieth century, Duchamp influenced Conceptual, Pop, and Minimal art. Best known for the sensational painting *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2*, 1912, he is also recognized for his ready-made sculptures, among them the urinal *Fountain*, 1917, and his "desecrated" *Mona Lisa* print, *L.H.O.O.Q.*, 1919.

Fauvism

The style of the Fauves (French for "wild beasts"), a group of painters who took their name from a derogatory phrase used by the French journalist Louis Vauxcelles. As a historical movement, Fauvism began at the controversial Salon



d'Automne in 1905, and ended less than five years later, in early 1910. Fauvism was characterized by bold, unmixed colours, obvious brush strokes, and a subjective approach to representation. Among the most important of the Fauves were Henri Matisse, André Derain, and Maurice de Vlaminck.

Favro, Murray (Canadian, b. 1940)

A major contemporary multidisciplinary artist whose sculpture, drawings, and installations have been exhaustively exhibited and collected for the past five decades. Favro moved from Huntsville to London, Ontario, as a teenager; in the 1960s he was part of a dynamic group of London-based artists that included Jack Chambers and Greg Curnoe.

Fisher, Brian (Canadian, 1939–2012)

An abstract artist and arts educator, Fisher became active in the vibrant art scene in Vancouver, British Columbia, in the 1960s and 1970s. During his career, he had both solo and group exhibitions, nationally and internationally. His most important Canadian commission was the mural he painted for the Montreal International Airport at Dorval. His work is held in collections across the country, including at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, the Vancouver Art Gallery, the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, and the Musée des beaux arts du Québec.

Fones, Robert (Canadian, b. 1949)

An artist and writer born in London, Ontario. Since 1976 he has lived in Toronto, where he is an active member of the artistic community as a board member, curator, arts writer, and teacher. Fones has explored issues of artistic production, materials, and representation in his photographs, sculptures, watercolours, and installations.

Geleynse, Wyn (Dutch/Canadian, b. 1947)

A multimedia artist influenced early in his artistic development by the London Regionalist artists, whose work surrounded him in his adopted hometown. Geleynse worked in printmaking, painting, and photography before coming to concentrate on 3-D model making, film, and video, which he frequently integrates into large-scale installations.

Gurney, Janice (Canadian, b. 1949)

Born in Winnipeg and residing in Toronto, Gurney is an artist and academic whose videos and installation projects often address the production, reception, and meaning of works of art. Her work is held in major national collections including the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa and the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto.

Happenings

Beginning in the early 1960s, these precursors to performance, film, and video art, Happenings were associated with George Maciunas and the international art group Fluxus. These ephemeral performances challenged conventional views of what was meant by "art," breaking down the barriers between art and life and subverting traditional, academic notions of the authority of the artist. Happenings tended to be collaborations and involve audience participation.

Hassan, Jamelie (Canadian, b. 1948)

An artist and activist whose work addresses issues of social justice, cross-cultural exchange, and global politics. Her multidisciplinary practice is informed partly by her biography: Hassan grew up with ten siblings in a Lebanese-immigrant family in London, Ontario, and she was educated in Rome, Beirut, Windsor, and Baghdad. She won the Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts in 2001. Her works are held in public collections across Canada and she has exhibited internationally.

Hill, Greg (Kayen'kahaka [Mohawk], Six Nations of the Grand River Territory, b. 1967)

An artist and a curator specializing in Aboriginal art. A Mohawk member of the Six Nations of the Grand River, Hill has led the Department of Indigenous Art at the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa, since 2007. (He was previously the gallery's Assistant Curator of Contemporary Art.) His installation pieces are held in major national collections around the country.

Lambert, Beverley (a.k.a. Bev Kelly) (Canadian, b. 1943)

The only woman included in the *Heart of London* exhibition at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, in 1968. Originally from Saskatchewan, she moved to London, Ontario, while her husband at the time, Alex Kelly, pursued his doctorate at Western University. She exhibited with the London Regionalists until her return to Regina, where she continued to create and show her art. More recently she has worked as a conservator in Newfoundland.

Lambeth, Michel (Canadian, 1923–1977)

A prominent Canadian photojournalist of the mid-twentieth century, Lambeth studied fine art in London and Paris before committing to a career in photography. Throughout the 1960s his work was published in *Life*, *Maclean's*, *Saturday Night*, *Star Weekly*, and *Time*. It is known to convey a deep concern for social issues and interest in urban street life.

Leduc, Fernand (Canadian, 1916–2014)

A painter and member of the Montreal-based Automatistes. Leduc's earlier paintings evince his interest in Surrealism and automatism; later he began to work in a more formalist mode and then in a hard-edge style, which linked him to the *Plasticien* movement.

London Regionalism

From the 1960s to the early 1990s, the arts community in London, Ontario, was exceptionally productive and dynamic, centred on the artists Greg Curnoe and Jack Chambers. Like-minded local artists, writers, and musicians rejected the notion of the metropolis as the necessary location and subject of artistic production, preferring to look for inspiration in their own lives and region.

Manet, Édouard (French, 1832–1883)

Considered a forerunner of the modernist movement in painting, Manet eschewed traditional subject matter for depictions of contemporary urban life that incorporated references to classic works. Although his work was critically dismissed, his unconventional painting style influenced the Impressionists.

**Martin, Ron (Canadian, b. 1943)**

An abstract painter, Martin is concerned with the process and performance of artmaking. Since 1965 his paintings have been shown globally in solo and group exhibitions, including at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, and the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

Matisse, Henri (French, 1869–1954)

A painter, sculptor, printmaker, draftsman, and designer, aligned at different times with the Impressionists, Post-Impressionists, and Fauvists. By the 1920s he was, with Pablo Picasso, one of the most famous painters of his generation, known for his remarkable use of colour and line.

Molinari, Guido (Canadian, 1933–2004)

A painter and theorist who was a member of the Plasticien movement in Montreal. His work, beginning in the mid-1950s, set new models for geometric painting internationally. His “razor-edged” Stripe Paintings create the illusion of a dynamic space, evoked by the viewer’s active engagement with how colours appear to change as they rhythmically repeat themselves across the canvas.

monoprint

A printmaking technique invented by Giovanni Castiglione around 1640 and revived in the late nineteenth century by, most notably, Paul Gauguin and Edgar Degas. A monoprint is produced by printing from a plate that is inked but otherwise untouched; the process typically yields only one good impression.

Motherwell, Robert (American, 1915–1991)

A member of the New York School, a major figure in Abstract Expressionism, and an influential teacher and lecturer, Motherwell employed the automatist technique to create many of his paintings and collages. Over the course of his career, he produced a series called *Elegy to the Spanish Republic*, 1957–61, inspired by the Spanish civil war.

Murray, Robert (Canadian, b. 1936)

A New York-based, Saskatchewan-raised sculptor trained in Saskatoon, Regina, and San Miguel de Allende, Mexico. Murray moved permanently to the United States in 1960; the same year, Saskatoon awarded him the first of his many public commissions. His work is held by major institutions throughout the United States and Canada.

Nauman, Bruce (American, b. 1941)

A major contemporary artist whose diverse conceptual oeuvre explores the meaning, nature, and experience of artworks as well as of human existence. Perhaps best known for his neon signs of the 1960s and 1970s, Nauman has also created performance pieces, films, sculptures, photographs, prints, and holograms.

Neo-Dada

A term for the constellation of experimental and conceptual artworks and styles of the 1950s and 1960s, from Fluxus to Pop art. It was popularized by the



art historian and critic Barbara Rose. Like their Dadaist predecessors, Neo-Dada artists were primarily interested in social, art historical, and aesthetic critique.

Nihilist Spasm Band

A noise band formed in 1965 in London, Ontario, and still presenting concerts internationally. Its members originally played homemade and modified instruments, and later began incorporating electronic instruments and effects into their sets and recordings. Composed of local artists and their friends, including a librarian, a teacher, and a physician, the band's current guitarist is Murray Favro, with John Boyle on kazoo and drums; Greg Curnoe was kazooist and drummer until his death in 1992.

Ondaatje, Kim (Canadian, b. 1928)

A painter, photographer, filmmaker, and teacher, whose work is held by the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Ondaatje was an important advocate for the rights of professional artists through her association with Jack Chambers's initiative CAR (later CARFAC).

Patton, Andy (Canadian, b. 1952)

A Toronto-based painter, scholar, and teacher at OCAD University. Patton's work over the past decade has been deeply inspired by classical Chinese calligraphy, particularly its dual nature as both a visual and a literary art.

Picabia, Francis (French, 1879–1953)

A painter, poet, and leader of the anti-rationalist and antiwar Dada movement in Europe that arose in protest against the art establishment and the First World War. Picabia's artistic production was so diverse as to remain unclassifiable; beginning as a Post-Impressionist, he experimented with Fauvism, Cubism, Orphism, and Futurism.

Pop art

A movement of the late 1950s to early 1970s in Britain and the United States, which adopted imagery from commercial design, television, and cinema. Pop art's most recognized proponents are Richard Hamilton, David Hockney, Andy Warhol, and Roy Lichtenstein.

Rabinowitch, David (Canadian, b. 1943)

A self-trained artist whose abiding interest in philosophy and science manifests in his work: cycles of drawings and sculptures that engage with questions of perception and reception. Born in Toronto, Rabinowitch has lived in New York since 1972. His work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at major institutions worldwide.

Rabinowitch, Royden (Canadian, b. 1943)

A highly successful sculptor whose work, inspired by both minimalism and modernism, explores the tension between passion and reason, values and facts. He has exhibited widely in Canada, the United States, and Europe since 1978, and his work is held at major contemporary galleries around the world, including the Guggenheim in New York and the Stedelijk in Amsterdam.



readymade

A “readymade” or “*objet trouvé*” is an artwork composed of an existing, everyday object; it is “art” only by virtue of being presented as such. The most famous readymades are those of Dadaist artist Marcel Duchamp, who created and engaged with the concept as a means of questioning the nature of art and the role of the artist.

Redinger, Walter (Canadian, 1940–2014)

A prolific and innovative sculptor whose practice took off in the 1960s, when he was lauded internationally for using unconventional materials, developing new forms (including his organism-like “totems” and “skeletons”), and working at a tremendous scale. Redinger represented Canada at the Venice Biennale in 1972; his work can be found in major institutions across Canada.

Riopelle, Jean-Paul (Canadian, 1923–2002)

A towering figure in Québécois modern art who, like the other members of the Automatistes, was interested in Surrealism and abstract art. Riopelle moved to Paris in 1947, where he participated in the last major exhibition of the Parisian Surrealists, organized by Marcel Duchamp and André Breton.

Russell, Larry (b. 1932)

A graduate of H.B. Beal Secondary School in London, Ontario, and the Ontario College of Education (now the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto), Russell was a friend of Greg Curnoe’s and helped him to find his first studio. His work has been exhibited since 1954 at Region, 20/20, and other regional galleries. He taught at Beal and later at Fanshawe College, London. Since 1989, he has worked as a practising artist.

Schwitters, Kurt (German, 1887–1948)

An avant-garde artist who created collages, paintings, and poetry, calling all of these activities by his invented term “Merz.” He was influenced by De Stijl and Dada, and participated in some of the most notable abstract art exhibitions of the first half of the twentieth century. Fleeing persecution by the Nazi regime, Schwitters eventually settled in England.

serigraphy

A name for what is now typically described as “screen printing.” It was advanced in 1940 by a group of American artists working in the silkscreen process who wished to distinguish their work from commercial prints made by the same method.

Snow, Michael (Canadian, b. 1928)

An artist whose paintings, films, photographs, sculptures, installations, and musical performances have kept him in the spotlight for over sixty years. Snow’s Walking Woman series of the 1960s holds a prominent place in Canadian art history. His contributions to visual art, experimental film, and music have been recognized internationally. (See *Michael Snow: Life & Work* by Martha Langford.)



Spencer, Stanley (British, 1891–1959)

A painter of expressive portraits and multi-figure scenes. His complex compositions often evoke his Christian faith in a style reminiscent of both Neo-Raphaelitism and Cubism. Spencer lived most of his life in the English village of Cookham; his reputation soared following a posthumous retrospective at the Royal Academy in 1980.

Surrealism

An early twentieth-century literary and artistic movement that began in Paris. Surrealism aimed to express the workings of the unconscious, free of convention and reason, and was characterized by fantastic images and incongruous juxtapositions. The movement spread globally, influencing film, theatre, and music.

Symbolism

A literary movement that spread to the visual arts in the late nineteenth century. It encompasses work that rejects the representation of “real” space and incorporates spiritualist and revelatory aims—its artists sought to uncover the ideal world hidden within the knowable one. Important Symbolist painters include Paul Gauguin and the Nabis.

Tousignant, Claude (Canadian, b. 1932)

A painter and sculptor whose large, flat, stark painting contributed to laying the ground rules for Plasticien painting in Montreal. During the 1960s he painted large round canvases of brightly coloured concentric circles that produce dynamic optical effects. His later work, often monochromatic, increasingly emphasizes the objectness of painting.

Urquhart, Tony (Canadian, b. 1934)

A painter, sculptor, and curator, and a pioneer of abstract art in Canada. For a time a member of the London circle that included Jack Chambers and Greg Curnoe, Urquhart was an important advocate for the rights of professional artists through his association with Chambers’s initiative CAR (later CARFAC).

van Dongen, Cornelis “Kees” (Dutch/French, 1877–1968)

One of the Netherlands’ most important modern painters, van Dongen trained in Rotterdam at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts before moving to Paris in 1899. He was involved with several of the period’s great avant-garde groups, including the Fauves and Die Brücke (The Bridge). He is known particularly for his boldly coloured, expressionistic portraits.

Vincent, Bernice (Canadian, 1934–2016)

Vincent’s career developed along with the other London Regionalists. Her paintings often depict landscapes and intimate moments from her day-to-day life in the small city of London. Her oeuvre also contains forays into abstraction, and she has often incorporated geometric patterns into her realist works. Her paintings have been exhibited regularly since the 1950s.



Vincent, Don (Canadian, 1932–1993)

A graduate of Beal Art and husband of artist Bernice Vincent, he worked as a graphic designer, but is known for his documentary photographs of the art scene in London, Ontario. He exhibited his photographs at Region Gallery and 20/20 Gallery. He also wrote about the London artists in a 1967 issue of *artscanada* (formerly, and since 1983, known as *Canadian Art*). Vincent's archive is at the McIntosh Gallery, Western University, London, Ontario.

Wieland, Joyce (Canadian, 1930–1998)

A central figure in contemporary Canadian art, Wieland engaged with painting, filmmaking, and cloth and plastic assemblage to explore with wit and passion ideas related to gender, national identity, and the natural world. In 1971 she became the first living Canadian woman artist to have a solo exhibition at the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa. (See *Joyce Wieland: Life & Work* by Johanne Sloan.)

Zelenak, Ed (Canadian, b. 1940)

An important contemporary sculptor and a member of the London, Ontario, circle of artists active in the 1960s that included Greg Curnoe and Jack Chambers. The spiritual quality of his abstract works is expressed in materials ranging from tin and copper to plastic, fibreglass, and wood. His work is represented in public collections in Canada, the United States, and Europe.



SOURCES & RESOURCES

The writings, films, and interviews by and about Greg Curnoe are numerous, varied, and growing. He was his own best archivist, saving and systematically filing his papers, which are now held in the E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives at the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto. The following list of sources and resources is but a small sampling of what is available.

KEY EXHIBITIONS

Greg Curnoe's works were exhibited across Canada; in Europe, Israel, Brazil, Mexico, and Cuba; and occasionally in the United States.



Greg Curnoe's exhibition representing Canada at the Venice Biennale, 1976, photograph by Greg Curnoe.

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- 1961** November 3-December 1, *An Exhibition of Things*, Richard E. Crouch Branch Library, London (first solo exhibition).
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- 1963** September 12-October 2, *Art Work by Greg Curnoe*, Gallery Moos, Toronto.
-
- 1964** September 17-October 6, *Greg Curnoe: Stuff*, David Mirvish Gallery, Toronto.
- October 8-31, *John Chambers, Greg Curnoe*, Norman MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina. Catalogue.
-
- 1966** February 8-27, *Paintings by Greg Curnoe*, Vancouver Art Gallery and Edmonton Art Gallery. Catalogue.
-
- 1968** January 12-February 18, *Canada: Art d'aujourd'hui*, Paris, France. Catalogue.
- August 18-September 7, *Canada 101*, Edinburgh, Scotland. Catalogue.
- September 19-October 13, *Heart of London*, London Public Library and Art Museum. Circulated by the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, to Hamilton,



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Stratford, Calgary, Edmonton, Victoria, Kingston, Ottawa, and Charlottetown. Catalogue.

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1969–70 September–January, *Greg Curnoe Canada X Bienal São Paulo*, São Paulo, Brazil. Catalogue.

1975 September 5–29, *Greg Curnoe: Some Lettered Works, 1961–1969*, London Public Library and Art Museum. Catalogue.

1976 July 14–October 10, *Canada: Greg Curnoe XXXVII Biennale di Venezia*. Catalogue.

1981 April 16–May 31, *Greg Curnoe: Rétrospective/Retrospective*, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. Circulated to National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; Glenbow Museum, Calgary; London Regional Art Gallery; Beaverbrook Art Gallery, Fredericton; closed May 2, 1982, at Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

1987 November 25–December 19, *I Tell Stories*, YYZ, Toronto.

1989–90 November 4–January 4, *Greg Curnoe: Rubber Stamped Books and Works 1961–1989*, Art Metropole, Toronto.

1992 March 6–28, *Deeds Abstracts*, Forest City Gallery, London, Ontario. Catalogue, limited edition of 150.

May 23–September 3, *Research & Development: Greg Curnoe, Jake Moore & Canadian Culture*, London Regional Art & Historical Museums, London, Ontario. Pamphlet.

1995–96 December 7–January 14, *Evident Truths: Greg Curnoe 1936–1992*, Laurentian University Museum and Arts Centre, Sudbury. Organized and circulated by the National Gallery of Canada to the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, Halifax, and the Winnipeg Art Gallery. Catalogue.

2001 March 9–June 17, *Greg Curnoe: Life & Stuff*, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, circulated to London, Ontario, 2003.

2003 April 11–June 22, *Homage to the R34* [the Dorval mural], in conjunction with *Greg Curnoe: Life & Stuff*, Museum London.

2011 January 22–April 17, *Cutout: Greg Curnoe, Shaped Collages 1965–1968*, Museum London. Catalogue.

SELECTED WRITINGS

Greg Curnoe wrote prolifically throughout his career—poems, articles, book reviews, and letters to the editor in a variety of publications. He also curated exhibitions and wrote curatorial essays. See the bibliography in *Greg Curnoe: Life & Stuff* for an extensive list, as well as a list of unpublished material in the Greg Curnoe Fonds in the E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. The Canadian Art Database Project is an excellent resource.

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Blue Book #8. Toronto: Art Metropole, 1989.

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AUDIO, FILM, AND VIDEO

By the artist

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Souwesto, 1969. 16mm silent colour film, 30 min.

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War Museum, 1970. (With Pierre Théberge), 16mm film.

1936 CCM Prolite Flyer, half-inch video, 1973.

Recordings by Curnoe of interviews, lectures, and conversations from 1968 to 1991. The Greg Curnoe Fonds in the E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto [CA OTAG SC066]. Series 23: 84 audiocassettes.

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Cover image of the catalogue for *Canada: Art d'aujourd'hui*, Musée national d'art moderne, Paris, 1968.



A still from Greg Curnoe's *No Movie*, 1965, 16mm colour film, original soundtrack has been lost, Michael Gibson Gallery, London.

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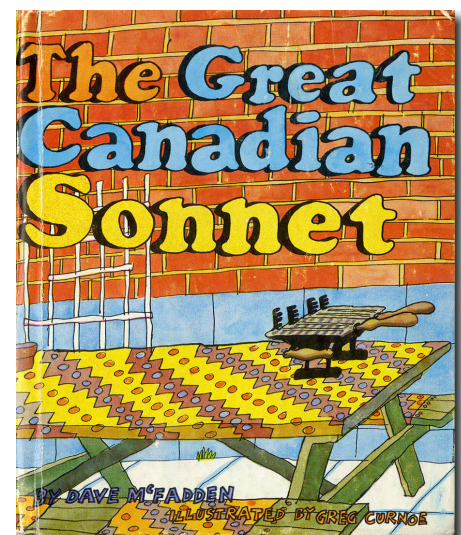
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The cover of *The Great Canadian Sonnet: Complete in One Volume*, drawn by Greg Curnoe.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JUDITH RODGER

Judith Rodger is a freelance curator and art historian based in London, Ontario. She studied at McGill University, University of London (U.K.), Western University, and University of Toronto. She has worked at what is now Museum London, at McIntosh Gallery at Western University, and at the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) in Toronto. In 1995 she began to catalogue the archival material of, first, Jack Chambers and, later, Greg Curnoe for the AGO. She was captivated by Curnoe's extraordinary breadth of interests as she read his journals, listened to his audiotapes, and organized the boxes and boxes of files that Curnoe himself had collected. Rodger is currently an adjunct professor in the Department of Visual Arts at Western University.



"When I first visited Greg Curnoe's studio in the late sixties, I was impressed by his quick wit, the colourful attire that matched his paintings, his occasional outrageous statement, and the organized disorder of the huge studio filled with works, books, and collections of what he called 'stuff.' Despite the years I have devoted to studying Curnoe's life and works, he still has the capacity to intrigue and surprise me."



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From the Author

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I am especially grateful to my family, particularly my husband, Wilson, and my mother, Mildred Maclean, who never complained about the hours I spent on this endeavour.

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Greg Curnoe, *Large Colour Wheel*, 1980. (See below for details.)

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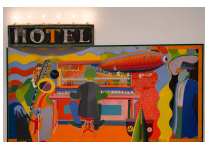
Biography: Photograph of Greg Curnoe and a Whipper's Beverage bottle with *TransCanada Pop Bottle Collection* in background. From James Reaney, "Greg Curnoe's Pop Art," *London Magazine*, Oct/Nov 1980. Photograph by David Homer.



Key Works: Greg Curnoe, *View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series*, February 10, 1969-March 10, 1971. (See below for details.)



Significance & Critical Issues: Greg Curnoe, *The Camouflaged Piano or French Roundels*, 1965-66. (See below for details.)



Style & Technique: Greg Curnoe, *The Camouflaged Piano or French Roundels*, 1965-66. (See below for details.)



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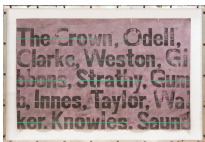


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Where to See: Installation view of *Greg Curnoe: Rétrospective/Retrospective* exhibition, 1981. (See below for details.)

Credits for Works by Greg Curnoe



(*Mis*)deeds #1, December 5, 1990–January 9, 1991. Private collection. Courtesy of Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016).



24 Hourly Notes, December 14–15, 1966. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, purchased with the help of Av Isaacs, 2000 (2000/70). © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016).



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A Pair of Drawers, 1961. Location unknown. Courtesy of McIntosh Gallery, Western University, London. © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016).



Above Glen Huron, Looking North, August 10–13, 1987. McIntosh Gallery, Western University, London, Ontario, Purchase, McIntosh Fund, 1988 (1988.0012). © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016).



America, July 1989. Printed by Don Holman. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, purchased 1990 (no. 30842). © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016).



Cherry Pop #7, November 18, 1964. Courtesy of Michael Gibson Gallery, London. © Estate of Greg Curnoe / SODRAC (2016).



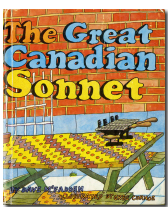
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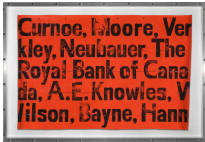
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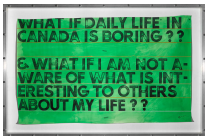
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Deeds #5, August 19–22, 1991. Winnipeg Art Gallery, acquired with funds from the Volunteer Committee to the Winnipeg Art Gallery and the Winnipeg Art Gallery Foundation Inc. (G-94-238). © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016).



Design for centennial cake, undated, c. 1967. Collection of Stephen Smart. © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016). Photograph by Christopher Dew.



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Drawer Full of Stuff, 1961. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, gift from the Volunteer Committee in celebration of its 50th Anniversary, 1997 (96/312). © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016).

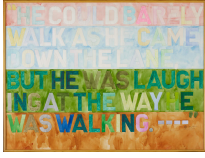


For Ben Bella, 1964. Art Gallery of Alberta Collection, Edmonton, purchased in 1968 with Canada Council, Director's Choice Funds (68.7). © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016).

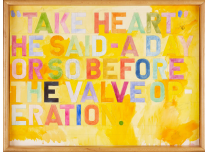


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For Jack #2, July 22–September 20, 1978. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, purchased with assistance from Wintario, 1979 (78/754). © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016).



For Selwyn #2, November 20–26, 1979. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, gift from Sheila Curnoe, London, Ontario, 1997 (97/120). © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016).



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Funny Bicycle, December 1985–May 20, 1986. Private collection. Courtesy of Heffel Fine Art Auction House. © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016).



Galen, February 12–November 26, 1984. Museum London, gift of Mr. and Mrs. John H. Moore, London, Ontario, 1990 (90.A.02). © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016).



Homage to the R 34, October 1967–March 1968. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, transfer from Transport Canada, 1998 (no. 39705.1–26). © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016).



Homage to Van Dongen #1 (Sheila), June 27, 1978–November 23, 1979. Hart House Collection, Art Museum at the University of Toronto (1980.09). Purchased by the Art Committee with Wintario Funds made possible through the Ministry of Culture and Recreation, 1979/80. © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016). Photograph by Toni Hafkenscheid.



Interior page of *Heart of London*, Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1969. National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives. Courtesy of CCCA Canadian Art Database. © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016).



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Interior pages of *About Painters #1*, 1964-88. E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto (Fonds Box 63). © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016). Photograph by Eva Lu.



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I Wai, November 11-13, 1992. Private collection. © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016). Photograph by Mark Kasumovic.



Large Colour Wheel, 1980. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, purchased 2012 (no. 45631). © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016)



List of Names from Wortley Road School, 1962. McIntosh Gallery, Western University, London, Gift of Owen Curnoe, 2002 (2002.0033). Courtesy of McIntosh Gallery. © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016). Photograph by Don Vincent.



Map of North America, 1972. Dalhousie Art Gallery, Dalhousie University, Halifax, purchased in 1978 from The Third Dalhousie Drawing Exhibition. © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016).



Mariposa 10 Speed No. 2, 1973. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, purchased 1974 (no. 17642). © Estate of Greg Curnoe / SODRAC (2016).



Mariposa T.T., 1978-79, in the studio juxtaposed against his collection of bikes. McIntosh Gallery, Western University, London. © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016). Photograph by Greg Curnoe.



Mariposa T.T., 1979. McIntosh Gallery, Western University, London (1986.0083). Courtesy of McIntosh Gallery. © Estate of Greg Curnoe / SODRAC (2016).



Middle-Aged Man in LCW Riding Suit, 1983. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, gift of Sheila Curnoe, London, Ontario, 1997 (97/127). © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016).



Myself Walking North in the Tweed Coat, 1963. Vancouver Art Gallery, purchased with the financial support of the Canada Council for the Arts Acquisition Assistance Program (64.23). © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016).



Owen, June 21, 1983-February 15, 1984. Museum London, gift of Mr. and Mrs. John H. Moore, London, Ontario, 1990 (90.A.01). Courtesy of Museum London. © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016).



Page from diary showing an early interest in radio, 1953. E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto (Fonds Box 78-3). © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016).



Sanouillet #2, 1980, watercolour, 153.7 x 77.5 cm. Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal. © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016). Photograph by Denis Farley.



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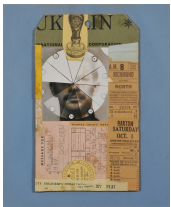
Self-Portrait #14, August 3-6, 1992. Private collection. Courtesy of Michael Gibson Gallery, London. © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016).



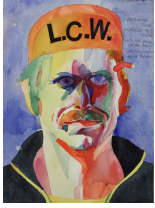
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Self-Portrait #17 in progress. Courtesy of McIntosh Gallery, Western University, London. © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016). Photograph by Greg Curnoe.



Self-Portrait from "Art Store Fixture," 1961. Museum London, gift of Mr. and Mrs. John H. Moore, London, Ontario, through the Ontario Heritage Foundation, 1978 (78.A.55). © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016).



Self-Portrait (L.C.W.), May 25-27, 1980. Private collection. Courtesy of Michael Gibson Gallery. © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016).



Self-Portrait with Galen on 1951 CCM, 1971. President's Art Collection, University of Regina (missing from the collection since 1983). Courtesy of McIntosh Gallery, Western University, London. © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016).



Short Wave Radios on Long Board, 1987. Museum London, gift of the Blackburn Group Inc., London, Ontario, 2000 (000.A.19). © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016).



Spring on the Ridgeway, 1964. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, purchased, 1965 (65/24). © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016).



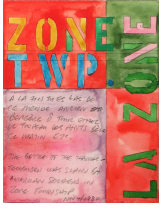
Sunset, Port Franks, 1988. Collection of Ian Ross. Courtesy of Heffel Fine Art Auction House. © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016).



Tall Girl When I Am Sad on Dundas Street, 1961. MacKenzie Art Gallery, University of Regina, purchased by public subscription (1962-007). © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016).



Tecumseh with Batoche Fragments, 1981. Private collection. Courtesy of Thielsen Gallery, London. © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016).



Tecumseh/Apollinaire, November 4, 1980. Private collection. Courtesy of Thielsen Gallery, London. © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016).



The Best Profile in the World, 1963. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, purchased, 1967 (no. 15309). © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016).



The Camouflaged Piano or French Roundels, 1965-66. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, purchased, 1966 (no. 14975). © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016).



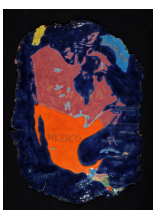
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TransCanada Pop Bottle Collection, c. 1968-89. E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto (33896). © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016).



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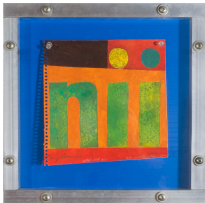
Video still from *No Movie*, 1965. Courtesy of Michael Gibson Gallery, London. © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016).



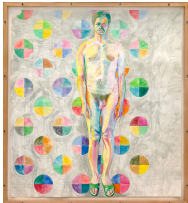
View of Victoria Hospital, First Series: #1-6, 1968-69. Installation view unknown. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, purchased 1969 (no. 15778.1-6). © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016).



View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series, February 10, 1969-March 10, 1971. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, purchased 1971 (no. 16894). © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016).



Wan Ha Nii, October 10, 1991-February 5, 1992. John Labatt Visual Arts Centre, Western University, London, gift of John H. Moore to the Department of Visual Arts. © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016).



What's Good for the Goose Is Good for the Gander, 1983. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, purchased 1984 (no. 28433). © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016).



Zoe, December 6, 1984-May 12, 1986, 1984-86. Museum London, gift of Mr. and Mrs. John H. Moore, London, Ontario, 1990 (90.A.03). © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016).

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38 Weston Street, 1995. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of Sheila Curnoe.



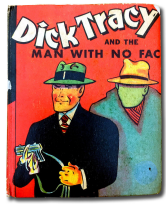
Close the 49th Parallel etc.: The Americanization of Canada, Ian Lumsden, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970. Courtesy of National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives, Ottawa.



Curnoe's studio in 1988. Photograph by Ian MacEachern. Courtesy of Ian MacEachern.



Cutting Greg Curnoe's centennial cake, 1967. Courtesy of National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives.



Dick Tracy and the Man with No Face, Chester Gould, Racine, WI: Whitman, 1938. Osborne Collection of Early Children's Books, Toronto Public Library. Photograph by Eva Lu.



Diego Sleeping No. 2, 1971, by Jack Chambers. Collection of TD Bank Group. Courtesy of TD Bank Group Art Collection. © Estate of Jack Chambers.



Friends at one of Greg Curnoe's King Street studio parties, 1966. Don Vincent Photo Archive, McIntosh Gallery, Western University, London, Ontario, gift of Bernice Vincent, 2009. Photograph by Don Vincent.



Greg and Sheila Curnoe in the studio, 1988. Courtesy of Ian MacEachern. Photograph by Ian MacEachern.



Greg Curnoe's studio with *Moustache #14*, one of the Greg Curnoe cutout collages, c. 1968. Don Vincent Photo Archive, McIntosh Gallery, Western University, London. Photograph by Don Vincent.



Greg Curnoe and others at an exhibition of artists from London, Ontario, at Casa de las Américas, Havana, Cuba, 1988. Courtesy of Fern Helfand. Photographer unknown.



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Greg Curnoe at work in his King Street studio, 1964. Don Vincent Photo Archive, McIntosh Gallery, Western University, London. Photograph by Don Vincent.



Greg Curnoe, c. 1938. Courtesy of Glen Curnoe. Photographer unknown.



Greg Curnoe creating *View of Victoria Hospital, First Series: #1-6*, 1968-69. Photograph by Pierre Théberge, September 1, 1968. Courtesy of National Gallery Canada, Ottawa.



Greg Curnoe in his first studio in the basement of his childhood home with self-portrait *Selfchildfool*, 1959. Don Vincent Photo Archive, McIntosh Gallery, Western University, London. Photograph by Don Vincent.



Greg Curnoe riding one of his bikes, c. 1974. Courtesy of Museum London. Photographer unknown.



Greg Curnoe on the phone in the studio at 38 Weston Street, c. 1988-92. E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto (Fonds Box 85). Photographer unknown.



Greg Curnoe painting *Doc Morton*, 1975, in his studio at the Western University, London, fall 1975. McIntosh Gallery, Western University, London. Photograph by Dan Miller.



Installation documentation from Art Metropole, Toronto, of rubber-stamped books and works by Curnoe created between 1961 and 1989, 1989. © Estate of Greg Curnoe. Photograph by Greg Curnoe.



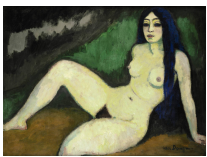
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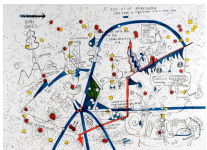
Installation view of *Greg Curnoe: Rétrospective/Retrospective*, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 1981. McIntosh Gallery, Western University, London. © Estate of Greg Curnoe. Photograph by Greg Curnoe.



Installing the *Young London (A Survey)* exhibition at 20/20 Gallery in London, Ontario, c. December 1966. Don Vincent Photo Archive, McIntosh Gallery, Western University, London. Photograph by Don Vincent.



La sirène espagnole, c. 1912, by Cornelis "Kees" Van Dongen. Private collection.



Look at Me Dairy Queen, Here I Am, 2011, by Jason McLean. Museum London, purchased, Art Fund, 2013 (013.A.017). © Jason McLean.



Mz 316 ische gelb (Mz 316 ische Yellow), 1921, by Kurt Schwitters. The Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven (1953.6.71).



Poster for *The Celebration*, 1962. Courtesy of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Photograph by Michel Lambeth.



Performance documentation of *The Celebration*, February 3, 1962, at London Public Library and Art Gallery (now Museum London). Don Vincent Photo Archive, McIntosh Gallery, Western University, London. Photograph by Don Vincent.



The Curnoe family at Dingman Creek, c. 1946. Courtesy of Glen Curnoe. Photographer unknown.



The Nihilist Spasm Band at the York Hotel, 1968. Courtesy of Ian MacEachern. Photograph by Ian MacEachern.



View of Victoria Hospital from Curnoe's studio window, c. 1974. Courtesy of McIntosh Gallery, Western University, London. © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016). Photograph by Greg Curnoe.

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